

# **NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN AND WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR**

Appointed on January 5, 1987

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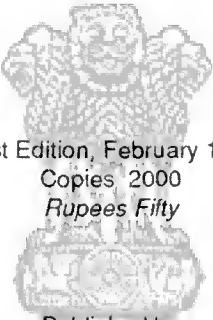
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Report signed on June 1988, New Delhi



**SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association)**  
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## FOREWORD

It has been a long road. When SEWA was formed in 1972 we chose the term 'self employed women' to describe the millions of women workers outside the organised sector. Although, the term seemed right and although we had some idea of these women and their problems in Ahmedabad, we had no idea that we were taking up the cause of a vast sector comprising 89 per cent of the work force. Today 17 years later, the 'Shramshakti' Report of the Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector has explored in detail the world of self-employed women, has described their living conditions in different parts of the country, their survival strategies, their struggles and, above all, their indomitable spirit.

The Shramshakti report has proved once and for all that self-employed women are a large, important and essential segment of our economy. Nevertheless, to find a place in policy-makers' perception itself has been a long struggle. When we first started talking about the problems and needs of self-employed women we were told they did not exist: 'Women were housewives, they did not work.' 'Self-employed workers were only a small section of the economy and mainly independent businessmen'. 'Women worked part-time in their 'leisure' time, and could not be counted as workers'. 'The working class was in the factories, the self-employed were not workers at all'. In other words, we found that whenever we began to raise the issues of self-employed women, we had first to answer questions about their very existence. We began to discover the anomalous situation that 89% of work force was in fact invisible; it did not count as part of the labour movement, its contribution to the gross national product was rarely accounted for, and the women workers were not even counted by the census.

In these circumstances, we realised that SEWA's essential task was to act as a forum for making the self-employed women visible. This task went far beyond our membership. We found that by raising the issues of our own members, we were raising the visibility of the self-employed women all over the country. On the other hand, unless self-employed women were made nationally visible the situation of our members will be considered a special case and not given due importance.

But how to achieve this visibility? Looking back at the history of the labour movement we found that the Royal Commission on Labour of 1929 was a landmark report which raised the problem and issues of factory labour to national visibility, and which was the starting point of all labour legislation. We felt that a similar Commission for self-employed workers would start a process of achieving visibility and addressing the issues of these workers at a national level. In 1984, the general body of SEWA passed a resolution asking for a National Commission on Self Employed Workers. In 1985 the Executive Committee of SEWA met the (then)

Labour Minister Shri T. Anjiah to press the demand. To our delight, in 1986, the Prime Minister announced the formation of a National Commission on Self Employed Women with our General Secretary, Smt. Ela Bhatt as chairperson.

The National Commission has brought out the crucial aspects of the life and work of self-employed women workers. It has made many important recommendations. We feel it is our duty to circulate the main findings of the Commission as widely as possible

We are thankful to Ms. Menaka Roy for doing the difficult task of summarising the Commission's report and we hope this summary is read and used as widely as possible. We hope that it will be instrumental in bringing about a basic change so as to give these hitherto ignored workers, their rightful place in our society.

**Renana Jhabvala**  
Secretary, SEWA,  
Ahmedabad



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## P R E F A C E

When the Prime Minister announced the formation of the National Commission on Self Employed Women, I had no idea that the responsibility would fall on me to carry out its objectives, despite my years of lobbying for such a commission.

This Commission has been an overwhelming experience for me, to meet and listen to the great women of India working in fields, forests, factories, mines, their homes or on mountains, roads, shores or in downtown markets. I now realise that they are not categories: 'self employed' or 'formal/informal sector' they are like the rest of the Indian working population. They are distinct only to the extent that their worker status is more unstable, more vulnerable.

I learnt that these women are better fighters against poverty than their men, have more calculative, stable, forward-looking strategies to deal with their own environment, yet the women remain poorer. But this cannot be proved through research studies.

Awareness has spread with education, though slowly, in the country. Awareness of their rights, and they being protected 'somewhere' by someone' is there in the back of their minds. The new opportunities are gradually catching their attention. In every group that we met, there were one or two bright, articulate, defiant young women ready to act as catalysts for a better future. I may venture to make a generalisation that everywhere in the country, these women are ready to absorb new ideas, more assistance, even to get organised to better their future. This is the most imminent challenge posed before us by these women today. If left to Women's Groups and to the poor women's own efforts, it is unlikely that such organisations will come up that soon, and in large enough numbers to make a significant dent in the condition of these women.

That is why the Commission has recommended to the Government to actively help initiate and maintain a network of grass-root level organisations like Village Mahila Mandals. It is ironic that one is asking the State to support a machinery to promote action for change in state policies, but we have done it with great hope on the strength of the Foreword of our Seventh Plan stating 'Development is basically about people'. Women (people) must participate if the nation has to develop. Therefore, I strongly plead for entrusting the Village Mahila Mandals with the responsibility, first, of implementing of poverty-alleviation programmes and, second with block level planning, monitoring and setting targets for women's development at the local level. To fight the wrath of nature, droughts and floods, I believe the Village Mahila Mandal is the best vehicle.

Everywhere in the country we found that women were the most committed proponents of our future. A concern for the future is strong within them. So the future of the nation lies in the hands of these women. No doubt, they have made plans for the future, and also share the dreams for entering the 21st century with steadier step along with the Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Therefore, we recommend a fair, concrete share for women in the coming Eighth Plan.

Many comprehensive policy recommendations have been outlined in the final chapter of this Report. These will help to lead us into the Eighth Plan with a positive sense of moving towards equality and social dignity for all our citizens. They are only small seeds of change, but every year we see the women of this country cultivate abundant crops from such small seeds.

I take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of India for setting up such an important Commission to find ways and means to ameliorate the sufferings of the unprotected labouring women. I thank the distinguished Members of the Commission. My special thanks go to Dr. A. Desai and Smt. Mrinal Pande for their valuable contributions. Dr. Desai's probing mind and objective approach has enriched the subject matter of the Report. Smt. Pande with her vast experience in media, actively helped in the preparation of the Video Report. I would like to thank Dr. R. Thamarajakshi for diligently going through the final draft of the report. I thank Miss Veena Kohli, Member Secretary for her energetic, dedicated contribution to prepare the Report, and in time. I thank members of the Task Force, others -- scholars, numerous voluntary agencies all over the country, and government officials in various States for their advice and cooperation. I particularly thank the secretariat for their untiring, ever-smiling teamwork. All my humble thanks to the countless labouring women whom I met, as they are the "Shakti" personified.

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**Ela R. Bhatt**

## INTRODUCTION

The National Commission on Self Employed Women was constituted by the Government of India to make a comprehensive study of the working and living conditions of poor women in poverty.

The terms of reference of the Commission are as follows:

- (i) To examine the present status of women in the self-employed sector with special reference to employment, health education and social status.
- (ii) To assess the impact of various labour legislations on the self-employed specially in respect of maternity benefits and health insurance.
- (iii) To identify the constraints on increase of productivity of self-employed women and the gaps in training, credit, upgradation of skills and marketing.
- (iv) To survey employment patterns, including production relations and assess their impact on the wages of the self-employed women.
- (v) To undertake a survey of the effects of macro policies relating to investment, production and technology on the status of self-employed women.
- (vi) To consider the link between the productive and re-productive roles of the self-employed women, with special reference to their health status.
- (vii) To suggest measures relating to all sectors for removing the constraints which adversely affect the integration of self-employed women in the national development process.

According to a further notification No. F.9-110/86-WW dated 1 April 1987 the above terms of reference were extended to cover all unprotected women labour in the country and extend to women in the informal sector.

The Commission decided that it will cover and study the entire gambit of unprotected labouring women to include self-employed and wage labour, paid and unpaid labour and contract labour.

The Commission decided to cover following categories of workers:

- (a) Women doing manual work like agriculture, construction labour and other sectors.
- (b) Home-based producers (including artisans and piece-rate workers).
- (c) Women engaged in processing work in traditional and non-traditional areas.



- (d) Providers of services like washerwomen, scavengers and domestic help.
- (e) Petty vendors and hawkers who do not hire labour except for taking the assistance of family members.
- (f) And all other poor labouring women, in the unprotected sector not covered in the preceding sections.

In view of the wide scope of the concept of worker the Commission has used the terms 'self-employed', 'informal' and 'unorganised' in the report interchangeably.

The Commission also decided that all the terms of reference should be addressed to the following three objectives:

- (i) To bring into visibility poor unprotected labouring women to which the large majority belong.
- (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
- (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organising the unorganised women labour.

The Commission adopted threefold strategy for carrying out its work.

- (i) It decided to harness and analyse the existing research and studies available and commission new studies, wherever necessary.
- (ii) The Commission decided to tour the country in order to have meetings with women in the target group and to get direct evidence. The Commission decided to have a video coverage of its tours so that an authentic visual report could be presented to the Government which would relate to the conditions of the women workers in their own words.
- (iii) The Commission issued questionnaires to women to get basic information.

The Commission sent ten lakh questionnaires to be filled by or on behalf of women of the target group to all the States and Union Territories. After a considerable follow up, the Commission received 1.40 lakh questionnaires which were computerised. The findings were interesting and some of these have been corroborated by the Commission's tour observations and other sources.

While on tours in the States, apart from meeting women workers, representatives of workers' organizations and voluntary agencies, the Commission also had meetings with State Government officers which were generally presided by the Minister in charge of Women's Programme or the Chief Secretary. This willing support of a cross section of persons including women workers enabled the Com-

mission to complete its task of writing its report which is the first investigation of its kind at a national level.

The Commission is conscious of the limitations of its Report. The task given to it is very massive, the number of women workers involved are very large, the problems that these women face are vast. As against this, there was almost total absence of data in the critical aspects of the work and life situations of the women in the self-employed and informal sectors. It was not possible for the Commission within the time frame to get a fresh census done nor was it possible to commission studies at the national level. The Commission would have also liked to have met many more women workers than it actually did. However, in spite of these constraints, the Commission has tried its best to put together in this Report the issues concerning the labouring women, examined the existing institutions and mechanisms and given recommendations for future action. In doing so, the Commission has tried to voice the feelings and aspirations of the labouring women. This Report is accompanied by a Video Report which is an authentic account of the labouring women in their own voices regarding how they perceive their work and life situations, their concerns and suggestions for a better life.

The Commission is grateful to the Government for the faith and confidence that it reposed in it. The Commission does hope that its study will be useful to the Government and to other institutions and voluntary agencies who work for these women.





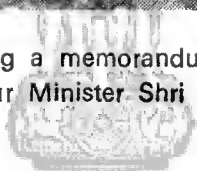
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**Chairman of the National Commission Mrs. Elabehn Bhatt  
submitting report on 5-7-'88 to the Prime Minister  
Shri Rajiv Gandhi**



Seva Executive Committee presenting a memorandum to set up a National Commission  
Self-Employed to the Labour Minister Shri T. Anjiah, 22-11-'85, New Delhi



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# 1. OVERVIEW

Although this Commission was appointed as the National Commission on Self Employed Women, it decided to cover all poor women because it was felt that there are some very important characteristics shared by all of them. These characteristics can be roughly summed up as : fewer and poorer opportunities to work; greater impact of unemployment, under employment and casual nature of work; greater vulnerability because of lack of skills and education; lesser mobility, heavy responsibilities; a systematic social practice of under-rating women's work; and lack of access to better technologies, tools and productive assets. To a large extent, poor women keep moving between the status of self-employed, casual labour, and unemployed.

Poor women are not a homogenous group. They are divided on various grounds like caste, class, and employment activity. What they have in common is deprivation and discrimination. They have poorer access to development. They are discriminated against in the family itself, in terms of distribution of income, consumption and assets. Consequently poverty affects women with lower consumption levels, poorer health and lower education. Women-headed households particularly have a higher incidence of poverty.

The vast majority of rural women in the unorganised sector is landless; they work in the fields, they look after the animals, they are actively involved in food production, food processing, forestry and rural industry. They also participate in construction work, labour in the factories, work in mines and engage in trade and vending. In addition, they have the burden of bearing and rearing children, collecting and fetching water, gathering firewood, cooking and cleaning activities which consume much time and energy. Deforestation, famine, drought and other calamities affect women much more adversely than men.

Although women work for longer hours and contribute substantially to the family income, they are not perceived as workers by either the women themselves or the data collecting agencies and the government, as all of them do not recognise the multidimensional functions of women which include their productive and reproductive labour. Women quite often are the major earners for their families. This also goes unrecognised.

Similarly, the approach of government to women's development is one of adhocism leading to marginal benefits. The declaration of the International Year for Women generated many debates on the status of women. The government appointed a Committee on the Status of Women which made a comprehensive study of the problems of all women. A chapter on Women was included in the Sixth Plan which was followed by attempts to cover women under poverty alleviation programmes and the starting of a few new schemes. However, government programmes designed for women have not been proportionate either

to their needs or their numbers. As far as labouring women are concerned, there has been no thrust to improve their lot by concerted efforts. This is in spite of the fact that the Seventh Five Year Plan Document recognises the plight of working women. In the context of women's role in agricultural production the Document records :

Women play an important role in agricultural production, animal husbandry and other related activities such as storage, marketing of produce, food processing etc. Apart from these they spend almost 10-12 hours per day doing household chores, including fetching of water and gathering of fuel. Large number of female labour are engaged in marginal occupations in order to supplement the family income by collection of fish, small game, firewood, cowdung, maintenance of kitchen gardens, tailoring, weaving, and teaching, **quantification of these activities in terms of work hours contributed, or its income generating equivalent, was not attempted or recorded** (emphasis added). Some of the new technologies have displaced women from many of the traditional activities. The incomes of the poor households are increased by women, although they have to face many problems due to family responsibility, limited mobility and social restrictions. The Green Revolution has led to increased demands for casual labour, dispossession of small landholders from their land and consequently, pushing out of women from such small land holdings to become wage earners. Though many of the tasks performed by males are getting mechanised, the women continue to toil in labour intensive jobs, like rice transplantations, cleaning and storage of grain in post harvest operations, picking of leaves and fruits, hand shelling of groundnut, picking out common seed etc.

In the Planing processes, under the trickle-down theory it was expected that women will equally benefit along with men. This has been belied by actual developments. The Sixth Plan Document recognises that "in spite of the development measures and Constitutional legal guarantees, women have lagged behind in almost all sectors." In the past decades, there have been various forces and pressures which have reduced women to a low and secondary place. These forces have been more dominant than those which have tried to push women towards growth and development.

The limited achievements in the anti-poverty programmes have been more than offset by the problems of land alienation and environmental degradation, increasing agricultural poverty, concentration of resources in a few hands, increasing polarisation of the rich and the poor, and polarisation between urban and rural areas. Women have been particularly hard hit by these developments.

In spite of their important role in agricultural production, the land reform measures like land ceiling and distribution and tenancy reforms have not benefited them because land has rarely been in the name of women. More and more

common property resources have been taken over by the government or have been privatised. This has added to the burden of women who are almost solely responsible for collecting and fetching water, gathering firewood, small game and other forest produce. Environmental degradation like deforestation and commercialization of forest resources, and indiscriminate tapping of ground water resources have further aggravated women's problems. Increasing agricultural poverty has led many men to migrate in search of work, leaving their families behind to face the consequences. To this could be added large scale displacement by dams and industrial projects which do not always bring benefits to the local population. The displaced persons become pauperized and their women are the worst affected since rehabilitation plans make no attempt whatsoever to help the women to gainful employment, to attempt to compensate the loss of the economic activity in their previous locations.

### **Gender inequalities**

The labour market is not neutral to men and women. It favours men against women. Gender inequalities exist in almost all sectors. The division of labour is highly sex biased. In rice cultivation, for example, seeding, transplanting, weeding and threshing operations are women's jobs while ploughing is done by men. In the textile industry, in most areas, weaving is essentially done by men while women do spinning and other operations. Similarly, in construction work, men do the skilled jobs of brick laying while women mix mortar and carry headloads of earth and bricks.

The discrimination is further manifested in male and female earnings which has been revealed by micro studies, according to which operations that fetch higher wages are male preserves, whereas work of arduous nature bringing in lower wages is done by women. The same is the case in industries like bidi-making, construction work, cashew cultivation and coir industry. Here women are assigned unskilled work; they are paid less even in skilled operations.

In the urban informal sector, some of the lowest paid occupations have a disproportionately high percentage of women. In the organised sector, 90 percent of the women are found in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. There are a large number of marginal female workers and they face strong "discouraged worker effect" in the slack season.

Gender inequality is also marked in acquiring educational and vocational skills. In spite of the impressive increase in total numbers of literate women the male-female gaps remain large, and a slow rate of progress of women's education is noted with a virtual stagnation in the area of technical education. The male-female gaps in enrolment tend to increase with successive higher levels of education. The rural-urban differences in literacy rates continued to be much larger for women. Amongst children between 6 to 11 years one out



of every 3 girls is outside the schools while the enrolment of boys is reported to be 100 per cent. The drop-out rate of girls is very high compared to boys.

A major shortcoming of the education strategy has been that workers in poverty-stricken groups of landless farmers, marginal workers in unorganised sector, urban slum dwellers, workers and migrant workers have not been reached. Since women have less access to education and skill training, they are unable to exploit the instruments through which women can attain equality. The present situation of illiteracy amongst women, which is negatively related to fertility rates and infant child mortality rates, further perpetuate gender inequalities.

### **Growth of unorganised sector**

There has been a phenomenal growth of the unorganised sector. Given the labour market conditions and the existing socio-economic environment most of the female work force is in the informal unorganised sector. The labour force in the unorganised sector is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or doing their own account work at very uneconomical returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high, resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions, and occupational health hazards. The organised sector takes advantage of this vulnerable position of the labour force in the unorganised sector. Large industries now find it advantageous to decentralise production units of larger, registered units. The powerloom industry is a case in point where large segments of artisans and workers are not independent producers, but are either employed on piece-rate basis or controlled by advances or working on substantive orders for large industrial units. A typical example is that of the large number of bidi workers. While advantages are being claimed by the principal employers on the ground that it is a small-scale or cottage industry, the labour force is actually working for a pittance.

### **Women-headed households**

The number of women-headed households are maximum among the poor. Women-headed households are a result of widowhood, migration, desertion or the illness/unemployment/addictive habits of their husbands. The delivery structures normally do not recognise women as heads of households. Therefore, they are deprived of many schemes of the government and public institutions. Secondly, they suffer a higher incidence of poverty and occupy the bottom rung of society. There is no worthwhile social security for widows, or women who have been deserted or whose husbands have gone away as migrant contract labour and have not returned. The Commission's own assessment is that women-headed households have increased in recent years although the official data-collecting services do not register this.

## **Technology**

Modernisation and technological changes have affected women adversely. Growth of technology and commercialization have led to mass production and have also in turn resulted in some increase in employment. There has been a marginal improvement in women's employment in sectors like electronics. But the number of women who have been thrown out of employment is far greater. The introduction of new technology in the long run requires new skills. Women do not have access to these skills and training. In many cases women have been forced to move out from skilled areas to unskilled areas. Women working on their own account have also suffered due to technological changes and they are swelling the ranks of landless/casual/marginal workers. Hardly any research has been done to evolve technology which will improve the employment situation of women and alleviate their drudgery by developing tools which could make their work simple.

## **Credit, raw material, and marketing**

Promotion of women's employment faces several obstacles, one of them being an increasingly complex marketing and credit system. Cheaper forms of credit have been made available through financial institutions but the central problem faced by women in low income earning ventures is that they have no security to offer. According to the existing schemes for small loans to women living below the poverty line, no security should be asked for, but in practice, this is insisted upon. The problems faced in extending credit to women are socio-economic. Attitudes to women do not allow them to take up independent economic ventures. Further, women are largely unaware of the existing credit facilities or physically unable to reach the banks, particularly in rural areas. They are also reluctant to approach the banks because they are unfamiliar with the policies and cumbersome procedures which is further compounded by their illiteracy and the inability of the authorities to comprehend the credit requirements of poor women. Although women have proved themselves better in repaying of loans than men, the bias is towards men. Another obstacle is the tendency of the banks to finance large enterprises rather than small ones. Women in particular are normally involved in very small enterprises and they need small loans for carrying out their day to day business. Since credit is not easily available to them from financial institutions they invariably fall victim to the avaricious money-lenders who charge exorbitantly high rates of interest. This leads to a vicious circle where the required amount of raw material is not available because of lack of credit facilities. Since women cannot expand their ventures they are unable to face competition; they either stagnate or are weeded out of their own account work.

The situation in the sphere of marketing is very similar. The forces operating and controlling marketing have become complex, demanding better designs and

techniques and mass production. The immediate local market can no longer absorb their entire production. For instance, the synthetic ropes produced by mass production methods are competing with coir or grass ropes. Even the collective struggle of women producers may not protect their source of livelihood, let alone improve their working conditions. This decline in handicrafts was initiated during the colonial period. The government's efforts to revitalise these old handicrafts and sick industries have been thwarted by its own counter policy of industrialisation and commercialisation of the economy. Women who are widely engaged in these handicrafts are the major victims; they steadily swell the ranks of rural labour migrants in urban areas.

A large section of the poor self-employed women doing their own account work, who are engaged in unorganised work are exploited by various people like wholesalers and money-lenders, and even the municipal authorities and police. Even to sell their wares, they have to suffer the humiliation of being insulted by local authorities. The system of licensing of space vendors is cumbersome and inadequate. To get a licence, the women interviewed by the Commission reported that they have to fall into the system of bribery, which they can ill afford.

### **Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes and Minority Groups**

The Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) have for centuries been socially ostracized and economically deprived, making them the most vulnerable group. The founding fathers of our Republic recognised this fact and thus made special provisions in the Constitution for granting special privileges to them to bring them into the mainstream. However, the fact remains that in spite of the well-intentioned policies of the Government and various on-going schemes/programmes for their welfare and development, the majority are not able to take full advantage of these schemes and programmes for lack of knowledge and access, due to the domination of powerful vested interests. Within these groups women remain more deprived.

Most of the SC/ST are landless labour and hence the bulk of their women folk are working at subsistence level, along with their men folk, as agricultural labourers, construction workers, or are engaged in gathering fuel and fodder and fetching water. Many are engaged in producing traditional handicraft items. The ST who were mainly forest dwellers were traditionally dependent on the forest for their daily necessities. With the shrinking of the forest, the nationalization and reservation of forest lands and privatisation of common property resources, these people have been badly hit. Their women, who in their traditional set-up enjoyed an almost equal status with men, now find their sources of economic contribution denied to them. They turn to migrant labour which is one of the most vulnerable groups in the country.

The official statistics as available in the Thirty Second Round, NSSO (1977-78) brings out the situation very poignantly. More than 52 per cent of SC/ST in rural areas possess no land or property. Another 35 per cent own less than five acres. However, the Work Force Participation Rates among the SC/ST women is much higher compared to women from other castes and there is evidence of higher incidence of casual labour amongst these women. The lack of differentiation between casual status and daily status is also quite high.

The minority groups like Muslims and Christians together form the bulk of the illiterate and unskilled labour. The women are at the lowest rung of literacy and skill. This perpetuates the entire cycle of lack of skills and low wages which is difficult to break. Besides, all the messages of small family norms do not apply to them as extra hand means some additional income. Furthermore the low health status leading to higher infant mortality rates makes it difficult for them to accept small family norms. Large families add to the women's already heavy work load for which they receive little in return. Not surprisingly, their health status is very low. Religious taboos and social customs also contribute to enhancing the low status of women.

### **Migration**

Increasing pauperization in rural areas has led to streams of migration and polarisation between rural and urban areas with considerable concentration of wealth and social services in the urban economy. In addition, there have been migrations due to displacement by irrigation and industrial projects. This has affected women on two fronts. If men migrate then women have to take the total responsibility for the family left behind. If the whole family migrates, women themselves face the problems of having to perform the dual role of earner and home maker while living and working in conditions which lack even the basic sanitary facilities. In addition, there has been increase in the work-force participation rate of marginal workers. While men may not work for a pittance, women have no choice. They suffer exploitation at the hand of contractors, (as in construction work) and have to move from place to place in search of work leading to greater hardships.

### **Health**

The heavy manual labour performed by women, the shocking working and living conditions, malnutrition, repeated pregnancies and poor quality of health services take a heavy toll of the health of the women. They also suffer from other occupational health hazards like postural problems, pain in the joints and other such complaints. There is absence of data and lack of recognition of occupational health hazards in the unorganised sector of the country. Apart from the poor quality of health services and the poor accessibility of women to them, maternity benefits are also not available to women in the unorganised sector.

## **Invisibility**

While women carry the primary responsibility of bearing and rearing children, this responsibility is considered secondary to the role of male bread winners. In addition, poor women are invariably involved in economic activities. However, most of these activities are related to family occupations like agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, weaving, construction labour and cottage industries. The women's personal contribution gets merged with the family and becomes invisible. Even where she gets wages which are generally low, she is at best seen as providing supplementary income to the family. The reality, however, is that women's income is used for the survival needs of the family. Her domestic chores are arduous; yet she gets no recognition for this work. Although women have the dual role of reproduction and production, their contribution is considered as 'Secondary', 'Marginal' and 'Supplementary'. Even when women have to do vital preparatory work as in weaving, agriculture and pottery they are at best called "helpers". This under-valuation is all-pervasive. It manifests itself in disparities in wages and other rewards for women labour, in access to and control over resources, in lack of infrastructural support and above all in great disparity in work burdens.

## **Legislation**

Laws for the removal of the overwhelming pressure of unemployment, women's vulnerability and a situation of surplus labour have not been effective. Two factors have compounded this difficulty, the emergence of labour displacing technology and an automatic preference by employers of such technology that reduces their responsibility for labour management. Moreover, the implementation machinery of the government is very weak. Government as an employer has proved to be a poor model. During its field visits the National Commission found that in a number of cases even the basic amenities of clean water, toilet facilities, and creches were not provided in the government-run establishments/factories.

A widely held view is that employers show a preference for women only when they are prepared to accept lower wages than men and also because they are expected to be more docile and submissive. Thus laws for the protection of women workers such as maternity benefits, childcare, removal of discrimination in wages, only result in the reduction of women in organized employment and push them more and more into unorganized, more exploitative and invisible occupations.

The phenomenal growth of the unorganized sector which hardly falls within the ambit of labour and common laws, has further increased the vulnerability of women who are divided by their economic conditions, class, linguistic community and caste and affects their capacity to organize themselves to fight for their rights as workers. Women's participation in trade unions and other organisations

has been negligible for various reasons and has adversely affected the process of obtaining justice as provided by law. The absence of suitable legislative or administrative devices for their protection is a big stumbling block in their advancement.

## **Housing**

There is a direct link between income, housing and economic activity. Lack of housing particularly affects women. They are the home makers, doing almost all the household work including childcare. Those women who are self-employed are generally home-based, so the home is also their work place. Further, in our social set up, women's needs for privacy are greater. While viewing the subject of housing, we have to go beyond the concept of just 'physical structure', it includes social and community facilities, essential services, and civic amenities, and it is connected with employment and earnings.

The housing shortage is increasing in spite of programmes being taken up by the central and state governments. The situation is worsening in both rural and urban areas. The accessibility to land, local construction materials, and natural resources is on the decline, which deprive the poor women of houses. About 70 per cent of women have no access to community latrine, lighting, and drinking water.

Priorities from the women's perspective are proper kitchen, latrines and safe areas for the children to play, while they are involved in household chores. The lack of these expose women to disease and sexual attacks (when they go out into the fields in the early morning or late at night). Moreover, when they are involved in home-based economic activities and cattle care, the limitation of space makes their living conditions worse, at times even bordering on a subhuman level with women, children, and animals living in the same area with little or no ventilation.

There has been a proliferation of shanty towns on the fringes of urban centres. To these towns and slum areas there is a movement from the impoverished rural areas in search of higher and steadier wages. Some come to live permanently while others come during the agricultural off-season but they all face a shortage of housing facilities and other civic amenities. The position of migratory labour is worse, as the demand for work compels them to move from place to place. Those who manage to get houses do not have any tenurial rights. They are normally unauthorised localities and face demolition and eviction.

Women living in urban slums, face greater difficulties than in rural areas, largely because of the terrible overcrowding, lack of privacy, and lack of essential services (for which they are entirely dependent on civic authorities). Also, they are terrorised by local thugs and slum lords and face a very real threat of

sexual molestation.

### **Childcare facilities**

Children in these families suffer the effects of poverty and all that goes with it like malnutrition, overcrowded and unhygienic conditions of living, lack of opportunities for education etc. In addition, they suffer from neglect or lack of proper care and attention from their mothers and other adults, who are pre-occupied with carrying on with their livelihood. Children from families which are constantly on the move, such as labourers on roads, railways, canals and other employment guarantee schemes suffer still more disadvantages, as a result of being constantly on the move. An often invisible victim is the young girl in the family who assists her mother in house work, in collecting fodder, fuel and water, in economic activities and the care of younger children.

The need for childcare services for poor working women is undebatable; such services are necessary not only as a support service for the mother but also for the all round development of the child. The existing childcare services can be grouped under three categories namely statutory, voluntary and public. There are laws which provide for creches for women in the organized sector like the Factories Act, 1948, Plantation Act, 1957, Mines Act, 1952, Contract Labour Act, 1970 and the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1980. In practice, legislation has not given much relief to women. Although as estimated by the Directorate General of Employment and Training there are 34.28 lakh (September 1987) women employed in the organized sectors, only about 50,000 children receive childcare services under legislation. The creches which exist are normally of poor quality and ill attended. And by and large, the law is evaded or only a token provision is made. Further since the legal obligation is generally linked up with the number of women workers, employment of women is discouraged or ways are found such as contract work to evade the law. As far as contract labour is concerned, again there is evasion of responsibility by the contractors.

In the voluntary sector, the Central Social Welfare Board provides assistance to voluntary agencies to run childcare services for poor women and in the unorganised sector the coverage is very limited. It caters to about ten thousand creches covering approximately 25 million children of less than five years. The creches are concentrated mostly in the urban and semi-urban areas.

In the public sector, the Integrated Child Development Services provides a package of services like supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral services for the children of less than six years and for expectant and lactating mothers. This scheme does not provide day care services for the working mothers. The anganwadi often works for only a few hours in the morning and they normally have low quality pre-primary classes. Under this programme, approximately nine million children are covered.

In spite of the programmes that exist, the coverage is very limited. Approximately only 10 million children get the benefit of childcare facilities. These facilities, in many cases, are only for 3 to 4 hours which do not coincide with the working hours of the mothers.

### **Political will**

There is need for an integrated approach to women's development. Under the state government's schemes, women as a subject are relegated to the residuary area of social welfare. Only a couple of state governments give some importance to social welfare, elsewhere, social welfare as a sector has a low priority and within this sector, women have the lowest priority. The approach has been to give marginal benefits to women in a situation of destitution and exploitation. There is basically no stake involved and no vested interest in their favour. The political potential of these women who are in large numbers has not been exploited by both women themselves and the politicians. They generally tend to cast their votes according to the wishes of their men. Political parties do not have adequate women representatives to take care of the interests of poor working women. All political parties are guilty of not owning upto the responsibility for advancing the cause of poor women even though lip service is paid to them.

### **Administration**

Moreover the Government machinery which is the largest delivery structure through which development resources are channelised has proved to be indifferent and ineffective in reaching the women. The reach of the voluntary agencies is limited, and they do not penetrate into all districts, blocks and panchayats. There is also a great deal of variation in their effectiveness in mobilising and organizing women to take advantage of the various developmental programmes.

At the planning level, there is consciousness about women's low status and a need to focus on women's development, however as far as the delivery system is concerned, it is based on a stereotyped concept of women's development where women are given some benefits in a sporadic and haphazard manner. The development agencies in their eagerness to complete their targets are not concerned whether there is an adequate coverage of women. Recently, in a few schemes like IRDP, targets are being fixed for women, but even there the achievement is below the targets. Fixing of targets under the Special Component Plan for the SC have proved useful. Similar fixation of targets in the case of women as separate disadvantaged group would have facilitated their absorption in the mainstream of development. The implementation machinery is largely insensitive to the basic needs of women in poverty.

### **Dissemination of information**

A crucial shortcoming in the existing machinery relates to the lack of any



effective mechanism for dissemination of information amongst women regarding women's development programmes. This lack of knowledge is one of the causes for the sluggish pace of activities relating specifically to women's programmes. Inadequate pressure exerted by women's groups on administrative structure has also led to the machinery not responding to the needs of women.

### **Constitution of Task Force Groups**

The National Commission undertook extensive tours in the States to see for themselves the working and living conditions of poor women. The Commission had a dialogue with the working women representatives of industry, voluntary agencies, labour unions, and State Government functionaries. Since the membership of the Commission is very small, they decided to constitute Task Force Groups in the critical areas of Macro policies, Health Communisation, Protective Legislation and Organisation to make an in-depth study to assist the Commission in its investigation.



## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

Estimates of female workers in the informal sector vary from 93 to 97 per cent of all female workers, depending on the sources and bases utilized : the total number of female workers (main + marginal) in 1986-87 is estimated at 113 million, of whom 108.1 million (or 97.1 per cent) are in the self-employed and informal sectors. The demographic and economic details of the lives of these labouring women are unfailingly depressing, particularly as they reveal gender discrimination in favour of males in every single sphere of life.

### Demographic profile

In the age group 0-4 years, the **sex ratio** (defined as the number of females per 1000 males) is 975, falling sharply to 896 in the 10-14 years age group. This is explained by the high mortality rate amongst females, due to inadequate nutrition and health care : nearly 1/6th of the total female deaths occur in the vulnerable age group of one year or less<sup>1</sup>, and a total of 27 per cent in the age group 0-4 years, as against 23 per cent in the case of males. The study of sex and age-specific death rates by rural and urban areas shows that, while in rural areas female death rates continue to remain higher than the corresponding figures for males in all age groups upto 34 years, in urban areas the female death rates are higher only upto the age of 9; thereafter the age-specific female death rates are lower.

The **maternal mortality** rate is 418 per lakh live births<sup>2</sup>, due to ill-health, malnutrition, anemia and frequent births. It is estimated that, on an average, a rural female gets pregnant about 6 to 8 times during her lifetime, spends about 16 years in pregnancies and lactation and gives birth to more than 6 children, of whom about 4 survive. The general **fertility rate** continues to be as high as 153.1 births (per 1000 women in the age group 15-59) in rural areas and 120.2 births in urban areas.<sup>3</sup> **Life expectancy** of women is 52.1 years, while for men it is 52.5 years. A contributing factor to women's ill-health and mortality is the early **age of marriage**. As many as 6.6 per cent of females in the age group of 10-14 years are reported as married, against 2.6 per cent of males. The problem is more acute in rural areas<sup>4</sup>.

These figures reveal that **urbanization** has a positive impact on women's lives.<sup>5</sup> However, women in rural areas most often remain in the district of their birth, and the main cause of **migration** is marriage, with only 3 per cent reporting education and employment as the main cause. Out of a total of 129.5 million female intra-state migration 76.6 per cent was rural to rural, 7.1 per cent urban to urban, 10.9 per cent rural to urban and 5.2 per cent urban to rural.<sup>6</sup> Very often women and children are left in the village while the men move to urban centres in search of employment. Among the female migrant workers reporting employment as the main reason for migrating, only 43.9 per cent were main

workers while 3.6 per cent were marginal workers and the remaining 52.5 per cent could not find any work. The corresponding figures for male migrants are 91.3, 0.7 and 8.0 per cent respectively.

**Literacy** is yet another area of inequality and deprivation. This is all the more crucial, given that literacy has a strong positive relation with mean age at marriage; a moderately positive relation with employment in non-agricultural and non-household industry, and a strong negative relation with infant mortality rate, crude birth rate and total fertility rate.<sup>7</sup> Given the overall position of disadvantage that women occupy, it is not surprising that the illiteracy sex ratio has gone up from 1138 to 1322 between 1951 and 1981 while the absolute sex ratio has been going down over the decades. Gender disparities in literacy are even greater in the rural areas : nearly one-third of the total districts in the country have rural female literacy rates of around 10 per cent or less and among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes it is almost zero in many areas. For all communities the sex ratio at the primary stage is 671, declining to 455 at the high and higher secondary stage, and further to 331 at the University degree level and beyond. Enrolment of women in vocational and professional courses also continues to be very low: in polytechniques and M. Com. the ratios are 107 and 222, while in technical and industrial arts and crafts schools it is 304. At the current rates universal female literacy is not likely to be reached before nine decades and states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh could take anything from 14 to 25 decades (i.e. about one and a half to two and half centuries).<sup>8</sup>

### Economic profile

Existing perceptions of women as workers are reflected in the accounting of female workers in the census and the NSSO data. There is gross under-estimation, to the effect of 30 to 40 per cent, and inadequate attention to unpaid family labour, own production, household work, and the relation between them.<sup>9,10</sup> In the 1981 census the **workforce participation rate** amongst females was barely 14 per cent (main workers) as against 51.6 per cent amongst males. The NSSO Thirty-Eighth Round (1983) records female workforce participation as somewhat higher at 21.9 per cent (main workers) and 29.6 per cent (main + marginal). 97 per cent are engaged in the unorganised, informal sector mainly as self-employed workers, wage earners, casual workers and non-wage workers.

Women workers suffer from a high incidence of **casualization**: the number of casual wage earners in agricultural and construction work amongst females ranges from 75 per cent to 96 per cent of the total female wage earners and the wage rate for the same work and level of skill is generally one half or less than that for males.<sup>11</sup> The sex ratio for main workers in 1981 works out to be only 253 as against about 5,000 in the case of marginal workers. According to NSSO data the female work force participation rate (main + marginal, age

5 and above) in rural areas declines from 39.3 per cent for usual status basis to 22.9 per cent for daily status basis; the corresponding figures for males are 63.5 per cent and 55.9 per cent.

Women are largely confined to strenuous and monotonous work that is irregular and undervalued. They rarely benefit from the introduction of **mechanization and new technology**. In spite of some positive effects of modernisation there is still very poor occupational diversification; thus about 80 per cent of all female workers are agricultural labourers, a large number of whom are cultivators displaced by mechanization. Similar effects have been noted in brick and tile making, fishing, and food processing, to name but a few examples. Women appear to be forcefully relegated to the position of a reserve force, participating in or withdrawing from the labour force as and when the situation so demands.<sup>12</sup> Due to all these reasons, they are forced to seek employment in a multiplicity of activities without security or stability, varying from unpaid family labour to wage work outside the home to the rendering of services in exchange for goods and services; the incidence is as high as 4.2 activities per worker.

**Unemployment and underemployment** are, thus, very high, especially for females. According to data from the Thirty-Eighth Round, usual status basis female unemployment is 1.41 per cent, whereas on the daily status basis, it is 8.8 per cent in rural areas.<sup>13</sup> This again reflects the greater incidence of casual work among females. In urban areas the incidence of unemployment according to the daily status basis is 10.9 per cent for females as against 9.23 per cent for males. Moreover, about 18 per cent of the usually employed females in rural areas are underemployed; the corresponding proportion in urban areas is 15 per cent. Underemployment is highest among casual labourers, particularly those usually engaged in agricultural activities.

The quantitative contribution of poor females to their **family income** is totally outside the sphere of the market economy and cannot be given an economic value. It is seen as part of a female's immutable sex role and her duty as a woman, and therefore she gets no credit for it. The NSSO activity code 93 enumerates persons who are outside the conventional labour force and who work on operations which increase the household command over necessities. If they were added to the conventional work force participation rate, the number would come very close to that for males. Women's involvement in these activities is positively related to their access to assets<sup>14</sup>: their participation in free collection of goods increases as the size of landholdings increases, upto 7.5 acres, after which it starts flagging and participation in activities like dairying, poultry farming, and sewing increase. The reason for this trend is that both types of activity allow them to combine productive work with household work. Under the present socio-cultural pressures women are burdened with heavy domestic duties and childcare. Particularly in urban areas, this means that women are isolated from each other and that the piece-rate system flourishes due to the women's desperate

need to earn.

The contribution of women to the **national income**, according to official estimates, is about 10 to 15 per cent, despite the fact that most women toil and labour their lives away. The reasons are several. As mentioned earlier, there are inadequacies in the definitions employed by data-collecting bodies; the earnings per woman in the unorganised sector in 1981 were Rs. 2720 per annum (Rs. 277 per month) as against Rs. 11,555 (Rs. 963 per month) in the organised sector.<sup>15</sup> Unprotected female workers in the unorganised sector receive as wages about half or less than what the men receive and the earnings of self-employed females is still lower; about 97 per cent of women workers belong to the informal unorganized sector.

A study of the Gender Bias in Employment of Women in the Urban Informal Sector, undertaken by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) brings forth a number of interesting findings with respect to the nature of women's work in the **self-employed sector**, some of which are briefly reported here<sup>16</sup>:

- (i) Occupational pattern: In urban areas, nearly 40 per cent of self-employed women are engaged in services, followed by 30 per cent in trade, 15 per cent in manufacturing, 8 per cent in construction and 5 per cent in primary activities. A majority of such enterprises consisted of one-person enterprises, engaged in petty business like dairying, pottery, making and selling of dolls and statues; goldsmithy; selling of pan-bidis, fruits and vegetables; fruit vending; laundry; making and selling of leaf, cane and bamboo products, collection and selling of firewood and cowdung cakes. In these occupations and others respondent and the family members are mainly involved as workers.
- (ii) Further, a greater proportion of the self-employed women outside the home (57 per cent) than within the home (43 per cent) : Of those working outside the home, only a very small number, i.e. 8 per cent have 'pukka' structures at their work place. A large percentage of them (over 60 per cent) are either mobile or operate from pavements and "are vulnerable to the vagaries of weather which spells irregularity in work and income". A lack of appropriate physical structure leaves them with a high degree of uncertainty about the place of work and their future plans for expansion and technological improvement in their work operations.
- (iii) Size of enterprise: Over two-thirds of the enterprises are self-owned and self managed. Another one-third have two to five persons per unit.
- (iv) Access to capital: The level of fixed capital in women owned or run enterprises is extremely low. Nearly two-thirds of enterprises have fixed capital of less than Rs. 50. About 10 per cent of the enterprises have fixed capital over Rs. 2,000. "In several activities, such as bidi, agarbati packing, rag picking,

rope and charpai making, the quantum of fixed capital used is either zero or marginal." However, the requirement of working capital in some other occupations is relatively high. In rag picking and collection of cowdung, hardly any working capital is required but in activities like embroidery, making and selling of dolls; leaves, cane and bamboo products; selling of fruits, vegetables and pan-bidis; food vending, dairying, poultry and running of dhabas, working capital requirements vary from Rs. 500 a month to Rs. 2,000 a month.

- (v) Input and output linkages : The requirements of inputs in self-employed sector are mostly met from the informal sector. The produce is generally sold directly to the households, without using any formal channels for distribution. "The production of intermediate or capital products by this sector is almost negligible." The enterprises are, thus, highly dependent on localized demand from households and changes in either the demand pattern or supply pattern often prove fatal.
- (vi) Level of earnings: Over 4/5th of self-employed workers earn less than Rs. 500 per month. About 1/10th of workers earn Rs. 100, only 10 % earn Rs. 300 per month. Women in weaving, spinning, embroidery, packing of bidis and agarbattis, selling of pan-bidis, cigarettes and rag picking, domestic services, scavenging, selling of groceries, construction and making of paper, envelopes and bags, selling of ropes and charpays, running of dhabas and food vending earn less than Rs. 500 per month. All such activities in which wage contract work predominates are associated with lower earning.

There are only 3.3 million females engaged in the organised sector out of a total of 25.3 million in the sector (1986 figures). Even here, women average about Rs. 10/- per day while the average for men is Rs. 15 per day. There are variations in the wages for identical skill and amount and type of work, as well as a bias in favour of men for many types of jobs and posts, and the total number of women employed in this sector is only 33 million, or 13.1 per cent.

Self-employment is the dominant mode of employment requiring no, or little capital, family labour and little training or family-based skills. Over 60 per cent of women are employed in this manner: in urban areas the proportion is 46 per cent while in rural areas it is 62 per cent with 63.5 per cent females and 65 per cent males among agricultural labour and 46.1 per cent females and 50 per cent males among the non-agricultural workers.<sup>17</sup>

To conclude, the entire discussion should be seen in the light of the acknowledged facts that given equal conditions, women live longer; that an improvement in women's economic position is invariably translated into an improvement in the quality of life of their family, which is not the case for men;

that women often work for longer hours and contribute more than men in terms of total labour energy spent, with a workday of 10 to 12 hours of unpaid labour outside the home; and that the proportion of women-headed households among the poor is very high, as much as 30 to 50 per cent, due to widowhood, migration, desertion or the illness/unemployment/addictive habits of their husbands, and in another 30 per cent of homes, women contribute more than 50 per cent of the family income.



### **3. IMPACT OF MACRO POLICIES ON UNPROTECTED WOMEN LABOUR**

Although development policies and programmes have had a positive impact in the country, the poor, especially women, have been inadequately covered. While examining the existing policies, process and institutions through which development resources are channelised the Commission has kept in view its findings related to unprotected women labour, namely that :

- (i) Among the poor, all women work.
- (ii) Women workers perform the dual roles of production and reproduction. This is not sufficiently recognised.
- (iii) One of the reasons why these women's work is not adequately accounted for in the database of the country is that largely they do not have a principal occupation, but perform multifarious activities.
- (iv) Women in poverty contribute significantly to meet the survival needs of their own families and also to the nation's economy and development.
- (v) Contribution by women to the family economy and the national economy remains largely invisible and is undervalued.
- (vi) Poor women are powerless, with very limited access to developmental resources.
- (vii) Women workers face economic exploitation with low and discriminatory wages and equally meagre remuneration for their own account work.
- (viii) Women are steeped in drudgery, doing arduous work for long hours, generally in unhygienic conditions, thus affecting their health adversely. They also have a low nutrition status.
- (ix) Protective legislation in the critical areas of wages, maternity benefits, childcare, and social security have not benefited a great majority of women in poverty.
- (x) Labouring women have a low level of participation in decision-making processes.
- (xi) Although there is no obvious discrimination against women in the plans and programmes and there are special schemes for them, during implementation various socio-economic forces have operated against them and



poor women have been largely left outside the pale of development.

- (xii) The monitoring mechanisms are inefficient and do not keep labouring women in focus.
- (xiii) The existing communication channels are not adequate and do not reach out to the poor women.
- (xiv) There is a lack of an integrated approach in the macro policies in tackling women's issues.
- (xv) Women workers do not have viable options that can help them in resisting vested interests.
- (xvi) Labouring women in poverty lack organising capabilities; this makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

Only the major policies affecting labouring women have been studied. Special papers were commissioned relating to crucial sectors like construction workers, handloom industries, fisheries, anti-poverty programmes and the like. In the discussion that follows the National Commission has examined the macro policies in various sectors as they affect the growth and advancement of poor women.

### **Natural Resources**

The three natural sources of land, forests and water are inextricably linked and projects and programmes concerning one, invariably affect the other.<sup>1,2</sup> The lives of women are intimately linked with all three, particularly in rural areas. The distribution pattern of the resources is so uneven that, on the one hand, we have a small group holding a large number of productive assets, while the majority, especially poor women, have limited access to these assets and own even less.

**Land :** In India, over 70 per cent of the population derive their livelihood from the land. A complicated set of factors determine women's access to and their control over productive and other resources. There are contradictions within the legal systems; for example, many customary laws relating to women's access to resources and usufructuary rights have been abbreviated by statutory laws, such as in the case of forest laws and land laws. The policy of land reforms which gave land titles to men was a great blow to women's struggle for resources; extension, training, credit, technology, and other inputs, were also disproportionately channelled to men. Extension programmes are designed by men for men and implemented accordingly. There are very few women extension officers; special projects in this regard (such as those financed by DANIDA during the Sixth Plan and the T & V programme in the Seventh Plan) have had a limited impact.

A very disquieting fact is that the number of landless is on the increase, among whom women form a large proportion, who turn to agriculture for employment. In several states, such as Maharashtra, the Commission was informed by the women that they are paid Rs. 3/- or Rs. 4/- a day while men get Rs. 10/-, for the same work; it is a different matter that Rs. 10/- is well below the minimum wage prescribed in these states. Also, the consumption of grains has not been rising proportionately with the rise in production indicating a skewed growth in agriculture with purchasing capacity of the poor remaining very low.

**Water :** The poor have difficult access to water, a vital resource. Water is a vital resource in a poor woman's life.

Water is required for irrigation and for human consumption. Regarding irrigation projects, costs are enormous, people are displaced in millions, forest cover is lost and there is secondary salination, alkalisation and waterlogging of cultivated or cultivable land. The Narmada Valley Project, funded by the World Bank and cleared by the Government, is a case in point. It is estimated that at least 2,00,000 hectares of agricultural land will have to be protected against waterlogging and the human cost will be quite unprecedented.<sup>3</sup> Increase in irrigation potential appears to be, in all cases, a minor and unimportant benefit considering all the negative effects, among which creation of landlessness is a major outcome. In rehabilitation schemes the loss of common property resources is not recognised and cash compensation given for land does not ensure livelihood or income; particularly for tribals the situation is disastrous because they traditionally cultivate forest land or collect minor forest produce and have no land titles and therefore are not entitled to compensation. Often, the project results in the water being directed to industries or distant areas, depriving the local village people of water for irrigation, as in the case of the Bindusara Irrigation Project.

The problem of drinking water is still very acute for a large section of poor labouring women. Available data indicate that only 56 per cent of rural and 73 per cent of urban population have access to potable water; this access is not easy and women spend 3 to 4 hours a day in fetching water. 2/5th of all villages are stated to be suffering from severe water problems, 158,000 villages do not have a source of drinking water, and in 26,000 villages the water supply is contaminated by toxic elements. Conditions of drought or flood in different areas contribute equally to the people's sorrow.

Crucial for water resource management are various factors such as the quality of the soil, which again is dependent on holistic integrated approach, with balance and co-ordination between the Ministries of Water Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development and other bodies such as the Department of Environment.

**Forests:** The collection of fuel and fodder is the primary responsibility of poor women; they are also dependent upon the forest for the raw material required

for their economic activities. With widespread deforestation they now have to travel longer and longer distances. While the minimum forest cover stipulated by the National Commission on Agriculture is 33 per cent in order to maintain the ecological balance, at present only 23 per cent of the total land area of 325 million hectares is classified as forest. India has been losing 1.5 million hectares of forest cover annually due to soil and wind erosion, waterlogging, salinity, and shifting cultivation. As against this, the total area planted during 1950-80 was only 3.7 million hectares and there is no realistic estimate of survival rates. It is estimated that 175 million hectares (or 53 per cent of India's total land mass) are subject to serious degradation due to rapid deforestation leading to loss of soil cover, siltation of reservoirs, waterlogging and salinity.

There is no doubt that the exploitation of forests for industrial and commercial purposes without an effective programme of regeneration, developmental activities such as irrigation, communication and mining, and neglect of village commons and grazing lands, have all resulted in depriving the poor women of their basic requirements from the forest. Common property resources are being usurped by private interests and the state by legitimizing the process of plunder, which includes barring access of the poor people to these resources. Thus the demands of industries like paper, plywood and rayon carry more weight than the survival needs of millions of poor people.

The impact of the government's afforestation policy has been negligible; this has had disastrous effects on the lives of the poor, particularly women, whose basic needs are biomass-based. Deforestation has destroyed the lifestyles of people, along with exacerbating their poverty and hardships. The social forestry programme has lost most of its force in implementation, with a definite slant in favour of the larger farmers, urban markets, and big industries. Rich farmers have switched to cash generating tree plantation, such as eucalyptus. Strip plantation is jealously guarded by the departments like Railways and Irrigation to which the plantation belongs; they are auctioned off to wood-based industries. Only in afforestation of degraded lands has there been some measure of success, but it is unfortunately being done only on an experimental scale.

The Commission is in general agreement with the recommendation of the workshop organised by the Centre for Women's Development Studies on 'Women, Social Forestry, and Wasteland Development' that the participation and involvement of poor rural women in such programmes can only be achieved through sustained financial, technical and managerial inputs during the process of asset creation until these assets start giving results.<sup>4</sup> A review of forest regulation is required to push the basic strategy of community-controlled and community-managed social forestry and economic development systems. So, it is essential that the organising of women is encouraged; the Chipko movement amply testified the collective strength of women even though they may be poor and illiterate.

## Women and Industrialization

It is estimated that only 10 per cent of the poor work in the organised sector<sup>5</sup> and there is a concentration of women at the lower levels of employment, at unskilled jobs with very little chance of promotion. Further, as modern capital-intensive technology is introduced, women lose out and are displaced by men, even in industries where women have traditionally been concentrated.

The changing relationship between agriculture and industry needs to be emphasized. Agriculture, which almost entirely belongs to the unorganised sector, has itself become dependent for fertilizer, seeds, water and electricity on Government and on industrial enterprises in the organised sector, especially in regions where the green revolution has had an impact. Consequently, agricultural productivity, and the costs and benefits involved, are critically dependent on the Government's decisions regarding prices of inputs and output. Further, the rural development policy is resulting in restructuring of the rural economy towards greater dependency.

Another form of linkage between the organised and the unorganised sector, also negative, is the subcontracting relationship by which labour-intensive processes are undertaken by workers in the unorganised sector, most of whom are home-based and work on piece-rates. This results in expansion and contraction of production according to market fluctuations and shifts the costs of fluctuations to the vulnerable home-based units, as is the case in the field of garment manufacture and export in India. Due to the commercialisation of agriculture the phenomenon of contract labour has emerged, comprising people displaced from their traditional occupation, who most often own no land nor any other asset. Much of the processing in land-based industries is done through subcontracting, or by self-employed workers to whom jobs are put out. In all these areas the number of women is very large.

Women labourers in the informal sector do not have any social security and welfare benefits in spite of relevant legislation being in existence. The current processes of industrialization have not resulted in any significant occupational diversification for women and their role in management and decision-making continues to be very limited. In this context the policies and programmes of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) deserve special mention for its inadequacies. Studies of the KVIC and the state-level KVICs have shown that the employment provided to women is of a marginal nature which does not even ensure them the minimum wages prescribed for unskilled workers and merely perpetuates the subordinate status of women workers, and that their lofty and worthwhile objectives are far from being fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

**Handloom :** Next to agriculture, handloom employs the largest number of women. They are mostly engaged in the pre-weaving process, as part of family labour.

A National Census is being carried out by the Development Commissioner of Handlooms. Earlier estimates put the number employed at 30 to 35 lakhs. However, although this sector has a potential for enlarged employment of female labour, it is facing a number of problems in the areas of technology, raw materials, and marketing.<sup>7</sup>

A major policy thrust in this area has been to organise the weavers through cooperative structures, with all the attendant benefits, but there has been no matching allocation of funds for extension, and training for cooperativisation. Though most of the weavers have incomes and standards of living below the poverty line, the focus in policy making is not wage-rate revision but on increasing their productivity through a. modernisation of looms, b. regular supply of yarn at reasonable prices, c. pre-weaving processing facilities, d. improved quality and designs, and e. more efficient marketing facilities and strategies. Such a policy package and resource allocation has been partially responsible for stimulating demand for high cost yarn and high value fabrics for the urban elite and export markets.

Several studies of handloom weavers in some talukas of Gujarat bear testimony to the deskilling and downward occupational mobility of these workers, with ruthless exploitation resulting in degradation of human resources. In order to reverse these trends it is necessary to tackle the problems swiftly while ensuring that the introduction of capital-intensive technologies is planned in a smooth, phased manner.

**Handicrafts :** A major problem faced by women in this sector is in getting a market for their products as they do not have access to consumers directly; also since more attention is paid to export-based handicrafts those that could create a mass domestic demand are neglected.<sup>8</sup> Due to current definitions of development, preference is given to the modern sectors' raw material needs which frequently deprives small artisans and craftsmen of their access to a market.<sup>9</sup>

Women in the handicrafts sector, as in other sectors, predominate in areas where wages are comparatively low, like bamboo and coir products. There has been a growing shift towards urban areas, to the non-household sector and towards increasing male employment.<sup>10</sup> During 1955-85 nearly 2/3 of additional employment was given to male workers, as in the case of products like jewellery, carpets and wood-carving. In the household sector as a whole, employment declined by 36 per cent and the severest decline of 62 per cent was among rural women, without proportionate increase in their share within non-household-based manufacturing industry.

**Licencing Policy :** Licencing policy is a means of regulating the production of goods and services in the economy, motivating people to produce certain

goods, and providing disincentives for others.<sup>11</sup> It is supposed to be gender-neutral, but its operation towards optimizing food self-sufficiency, exports and imports, and transfer of foreign technology has adversely affected employment opportunities for women in traditional sectors because industries like fertilizers, pesticides, heavy chemicals, engineering goods and modern consumer goods take precedence.

In the context of the licensing policy some issues that need to be examined with special reference to the needs of the labouring masses are: the choice of technology, employment potentials, and the strong cultural preference for self-employment in our culture, especially among poor women.

**Institutional fund flow :** A study of the fund flow of nationalised banks, the Life Insurance Corporation, the General Insurance Corporation, the Industrial Development Bank of India and the State Finance Corporation, in Maharashtra and Gujarat, shows that it is not in accordance with the proclaimed policy of poverty eradication, particularly in the case of women.<sup>12</sup> Of the 28 major production areas where women's work is concentrated, relatively large funds (of more than 2 per cent in any year) have gone to only 11 groups and have, moreover, most often resulted in the displacement of women. For example, in agricultural production, an area where women are concentrated, funds have generally been used for commercialization and mechanisation. This has reduced women's control over agricultural produce and small land holdings have become uneconomic, affecting large numbers of women whose family land gets sold, forcing them into the status of labourers and casual workers.

In this context the existence of individual money lenders gains importance because a majority of poor women are in the unorganised self-employed sector or work as casual/marginal labour for whom non-access to credit from institutional sources forces them into the clutches of money lenders, from which escape is practically impossible and which ensures that they remain where they are, at the very last rung of the economy. The Government of India, having articulated a strong commitment to providing the poor access to bank credit, needs to re-examine present trends and make plans accordingly.

**Raw materials, marketing, and other infrastructure :** Easy access to reasonably-priced raw materials, marketing links and networks, and other such infrastructural support are urgently required by self-employed women in the unorganised sector. Raw materials, particularly for artisans and craftswomen, are very expensive and in short supply while modern industries like paper and rayon get priority. Lack of access to markets has squeezed out large numbers of women who become casual or piece-rate workers. Products which earlier had a home market have been replaced by mass-produced consumer goods, partly due to stagnation in design and quality and also due to lack of support. The Government has a major role to play in ensuring that self-employed craftspeople have the first

claim to raw materials and in structuring marketing links. In her study Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj has recommended that raw materials should be provided through the public distribution system. This would lead to better access and controlled prices, and would also save the infrastructural costs of opening and running depots.<sup>13</sup>

**Education :** Among the poor, household responsibilities prevent the girl child from getting an education and a contributory cause ensuring poor motivation is the poor quality of education provided in schools for the poor. According to the 1981 census 25 per cent of women are educated as against 47 per cent men though this gap is not as wide in urban areas. Lack of access to education ensures continuation of the cycle of poverty. Education, specially vocational education, which would impart marketable skills to women, would lead to diversification of activities to areas where potential for employment, as well as remuneration, are higher.

**Training :** Training policy flows from the technology policy (next section). The Directorate General of Employment and Training in the Ministry of Labour launched a special programme for vocational training for women with the assistance of CIDA and ILO, under which the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI), New Delhi, and two regional VTIs were set up. At Present there are six regional VTIs, at Trivandrum, Bangalore, Bombay, Hissar, Tura and Calcutta.<sup>14</sup> In addition, there are 230 Industrial Training Institutes/Women's Wing of ITIs and Polytechnics, in the country. The TRYSEM and short training programmes offered by various Boards also provide training to women.

However, there is considerable wastage with only 51.2 per cent of trainees actually getting employment. Major causes for this are lack of demand for the skill, lack of adequate support for self-employment, inadequacy of the training, and indifference of trainees towards the job (when they did not belong to the poorer sections of society). Moreover, training in entrepreneurship, organising, general awareness and knowledge of legal matters is also lacking.

**Technology :** As per the official approach the technology policy in India aims at ensuring that our naturally available endowments, specially our human resources, are optimally utilised for a continuing increase in the well-being of all sections of the population. However, technological advancement has been concentrated in heavy industry and has largely displaced women from traditionally labour-intensive industries without providing them any alternative employment, either in other traditional industries or in modern industries after suitable training. Technological research has also not been directed to alleviating the drudgery of women, or to improving specific tools and machines used by women, or to improvement of health and safety standards of women workers. While developing and introducing new technology, neither its effect on employment opportunities for women, nor the occupational hazards caused for poor labouring women have

been given the importance that is due to them. These issues are crucial for the lives of millions and the question of technological advancement needs to be reassessed in this light.

**Anti-poverty programmes for poor women :** The strategy of direct attack on poverty was formulated in the early-seventies and special programmes for the poor were introduced in the Fourth Five Year Plan.<sup>15</sup> However, when it was realised that "the poor" did not form a homogeneous group and that the different sections of the poor faced different constraints specific programmes for each section were formulated. Initially, special quotas (% of the total beneficiaries) were laid down for poor women, but subsequently exclusive programmes for women were also introduced. The present set of anti-poverty programmes can be broadly divided into the following broad categories:

- (i) Programmes providing self-employment.
- (ii) Programmes providing wage-employment.
- (iii) Special Area Development Programmes.
- (iv) Programmes pertaining to land reforms.
- (v) Programmes imparting training for skill formation.

The major anti-poverty programmes are discussed below :

**IRDP:** The Integrated Rural Development Programme is the main self-employment programme for rural areas. Its objective is to enable poor families to cross the poverty line through the use of productive/assets. 30 per cent of the beneficiaries are to be women.

Data show that the 30 per cent target has not been reached; in 1985-86 the percentage of female beneficiaries were 9.89 and in 1986-87 it was 15.13. Moreover, benefits to the poorest strata of women and of female-headed households has been very low. Impact in terms of income-generation is varied; in Kerala it is highly negative while in Tamilnadu it is highly successful, according to different studies. On the basis of the results of various studies it can be concluded that successful cases of IRDP are found when (a) the region is relatively developed, (b) the scheme is highly income-generating, (c) the scheme is linked with appropriate training, and (d) the scheme is adequately supported in the area of technology, credit, purchase and marketing.

**DWCRA :** The specific objectives of the project for Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas are: a. to improve women's participation in rural development, b. to improve their earnings, c. to help them acquire new skills, d. to provide them better access to credit and to other social services, e. to reduce their daily work-load, f. to establish meaningful linkages with various other programmes for the development of the rural and backward sections of



society, and g. to generate marketable output of women from these activities. Under this programme groups of 15-20 women belonging to families below the poverty line are expected to be organised for self-employment, because it was recognized that this would be much easier than to reach individual women in isolation.

The overall picture of this scheme seems to be fairly satisfactory. Women have taken up traditional as well as non-traditional occupations. In 1982-83, the first year, 1000 groups of women set up schemes, in 1984-85 the number was 4635. However, yet again, the poorest women have not been reached, women's organising capabilities and leadership qualities have not developed much, areas of childcare and child development and reduction of women's drudgery have not been tackled, and the planning of the programme does not take adequate care of the different requirements of the self-employed, like training for skill formation, and in financial marketing and overall management.

**Wage Employment Programmes :** The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) are the major programmes which provide wage employment to the poor on public (and sometimes semi-public or private) works; a few states like Maharashtra are also implementing the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS).

Results indicate that the NREP has been largely unsuccessful while the EGS has resulted in substantial increase in employment and incomes of women, which has improved their consumption levels as well. The participation of women in NREP varies between 5 per cent and 20 per cent, sometimes going up to 30 per cent, while in EGS it is above 50 per cent and even goes up to 80 per cent. The wages paid on NREP and RLEGP works have been less than the minimum wages while in EGS the wages are frequently higher than the prevailing agricultural wages. However, widows and other female heads of households found it difficult to get jobs on EGS works, and there is a great deal of irregularity in payment.

**Special Area Development Programmes :** These aim at developing backward areas which are normally by-passed by the general development process. The main programmes are the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), the Desert Development Programme (DDP), the Tribal Area Development Programme (TADP) and the Special Programmes for hilly areas and the north-east zone.

A major problem in all these programmes is the over emphasis on self-employment, which is not a viable option for the poorest women, who are unwilling to take up self-employment because a. they have low level of literacy and have meagre income of their own, b. they have poor risk-bearing capacity, and a low level of enterprise, c. they have poor credit worthiness, and, d. they suffer from various socio-psychological constraints which come in the way of their

taking up self-employment. Also women are difficult to reach because a. the incidence of illiteracy is higher among women and they are less exposed to the outside world, b. they have a subordinate status in the family and in society, and c. social norms prevent them from freely interacting with male functionaries.

In addition, women suffer through the household approach of most self-employment programmes and the predominantly male ownership of family assets. This places them in the background and behind the men in the family because a woman's economic contributions, even if actually larger than the man's, are never accorded due recognition.

Problems arising from faulty planning mainly relate to the identification of schemes for women, provision of support in the areas of technology, training, purchase of inputs, and marketing; related to these are the problems caused by indifference of the concerned authorities towards women's needs. This is reflected in the low priority and limited financial allocation accorded to women's programmes which, therefore, suffer in implementation due to lack of commitment.

### **Some Important Employment Sectors**

In this section the focus is on sectors like construction, vending and hawking and domestic service, in which women are working in large numbers.

**Construction activities :** The situation of women construction labourers is particularly bad: they are forced into a nomadic existence working for contractors who most often do not fulfil their contractual obligations of providing shelter, water, toilet facilities and childcare facilities. Ration cards are generally not available to these women, their children are not enrolled in schools because they are always on the move, they do not have a permanent home, and schools may be too far away. Although protective legislation exists, it is rarely enforced, particularly due to the absence of workers' organisations.

Policy considerations relating to this sector have almost exclusively pertained to non-labour issues like appropriate technology or finance; the emphasis is on the economic aspects of cost-effectiveness. Because unskilled labour is supposedly available at zero opportunity cost no efforts seem to have been made in discussing the development of technology that may render the job of head-loading or stone crushing, which nearly 100 per cent of our women construction workers are involved in, less strenuous, less hazardous, and more dignified. Such concerns are generally considered the purview of social legislation; given the institutional framework of the industry as it is in our country, this is, de facto, non-binding and, therefore, non-functional.

A comprehensive policy on construction which will keep the women workers as the focal point needs to be formulated. This should take cognizance of the

temporary, shifting, and exploitative nature of this work.<sup>16</sup>

**Mining :** Here it is the introduction of certain policies rather than the lack of policy that has adversely affected women's employment, such as the labour laws which sought to protect women from night and underground work without providing for any alternative employment; or the growth of industrial laws which benefit direct recruits as opposed to contract labour; the Voluntary Retirement Scheme for women, by far the most damaging policy, forces women to choose between retrenchment and 'voluntary' retirement in favour of a male relative.<sup>17</sup> In coal mining alone, the number of women workers dropped by 30 per cent between 1975 and 1980.

Though protective legislation exists for this sector too, implementation is near-impossible as the workers lack the capacity for seeking legal redress in the absence of strong workers organizations.

**Hawking and Vending :** Hawking and vending has been a legitimate activity from ancient times, encouraged because of its great utility.<sup>18</sup> Today, however, it is increasingly regarded as illegal unless licenced by the municipal authorities. Since vendors and hawkers come from the poorer classes they lack the clout necessary to secure these licences. The problem is most acute in the larger cities. The attitude stems from the adoption of western patterns of urbanization according to which the ideal consists of clean and wide roads for the smooth flow of high-speed motorized traffic, completely disregarding the reality of India and the culture and traditions of the people.

A policy for vendors/hawkers is required that will take into account the fact that there is no viable alternative distribution system, that the persons involved are usually poor women who need support rather than the harassment of bribes, beatings or confiscation of goods and that licences must, therefore, be easily obtained, credit made accessible, and provision of space guaranteed. In the context of the latter, the Commission's visit to the women's market in Manipur was rewarding. A basic fact that must be recognised is that these women are providing a very valuable and indispensable service with a minimum of capital and must therefore be given the small assistance they need to make their lives easier. At present they lack every kind of institutional support, from credit to social security benefits and transport.

**Domestic Services :** Of all the services in India this is the most unregulated and disorganised, and often the most denigrating and humiliating.<sup>19</sup> These workers do the most menial, arduous tasks, have impossibly long hours with no benefits of social security, security of employment, wage raises, paid leave or medical facilities. Ironically, those who work part time in many houses are better off than those who work fulltime in a single house; the latter are even worse off if they live on the premises as they are then on call at all times of the day

and lose most of their independence due to their lack of any other shelter which is caused by the extreme housing shortage and exorbitant rents.

There is a pressing need for the domestic workers to be recognised as a productive force in the labour market to ensure them dignity of work, and to secure for them a stronger position through organisations and provision of effective legislation. A number of organisations working to improve their status came about during the International Women's Year and the Women's Decade. In September, 1987, a National Consultation for Domestic Workers was held in Delhi where a draft bill was also tabled for discussion. As domestic workers are perhaps the most invisible and unrecognised workers, the strengthening of their collective bargaining capacity is, therefore, a must.

### **Other Policies and Programmes**

**Women's cooperatives :** The Cooperative Movement in India has been only partially successful. The cooperative is an important instrument through which the poor can get access to credit, production inputs, marketing facilities, and other forms of support. Most importantly, they provide a forum for the poor to come together and thereby acquire a better bargaining power; alone and vulnerable, the poor workers tend to be easily exploited.

Corresponding to the number of cooperatives, women's participation has been increasing; the number of exclusively women's cooperatives has also gone up, as has the different types of cooperatives being formed.<sup>20,21</sup> However, many cooperatives fail to function efficiently and do not benefit the members very much. A vast proportion of the female population who could benefit from cooperative services remain outside the fold of this movement due to various constraints, some of which are to do with themselves, and some to do with government policy and the movement itself.

Illiteracy and inadequate facilities for cooperative education and training are major factors limiting women's involvement and their successful participation even if involved. There is a lack of proper leadership due to which very often the relationship between the promoting voluntary agency and the cooperative develops into the employer-employee mode. Training and expertise in designing and marketing are also largely absent, resulting in many cooperatives becoming defunct after a few years of struggle. A pre-cooperative stage for developing the necessary attitudes and skills is essential.

According to a study of the cooperative movement done for the Commission by Samakhya<sup>22</sup> much of the failure of the cooperative movement in India is due to the fact that cooperative laws do not encourage the spirit of voluntarism and cooperation. The process of registration is tedious and frustrating and, as with the few existing schemes and agencies that provide financial assistance,

the technicalities, complexities and inordinate delays are effective and sure obstacles. Though cooperatives are an effective means of empowering poor workers the system has not paid sufficient attention to the problems of the assetless unorganised poor who need assets in order to gain economic strength but are often denied membership precisely due to their lack of assets.

## **Urbanization**

In urban areas the strain on possible job opportunities is immense and the increasing stream of migrants are forced into employment in deplorable conditions. The impact of urbanization on women is variable; it has had a positive effect on the general status of women in terms of their health, education, and the quality of their lives.<sup>23</sup> In employment, however, urban females are at a disadvantage both in comparison with rural females and urban males, with increasing casualization and marginalization.

**Housing :** The living conditions of the urban poor, largely migrants, are deplorable. They mostly live in over-crowded slums with lack of ventilation, light, drinking water and toilet facilities. In our major cities more than 30 per cent of the population lives in slums where they face constant terrorization by local thugs and threats of eviction and demolition, which often implies the loss of all their worldly belongings and, sometimes, even their lives.<sup>24</sup> Land is scarce and speculation and profiteering spiral upwards, unchecked. In rural areas the situation is as bad because the progressive destruction of natural resources and rigid laws for control over them have led to a crisis in availability of land and local construction materials. Here, too, the problems related to sanitation and toilets are increasing because there are no installations of these facilities, generally, while open spaces that may be used are diminishing.

For women, housing has added dimensions. Traditionally, they rarely own land or house. They spend most of their time within the home or in home-building activities that may be partly outside the home. They therefore suffer the worst effects of poor ventilation, unsanitary conditions and stuffy, smoke-filled kitchens. Many of them are home-based workers, which is rarely taken into account. In rural areas the living space is often shared by the cattle which compounds all the problems mentioned earlier.

Some positive action has been taken as evidenced from vastly increased fund allocations over successive Five Year Plans. The Sixth Plan document declared that by 1990 all landless workers will get complete housing assistance. However, the target is nowhere near being achieved, and provision of housing units that are well below the number actually required leads to resale of houses by the poor to the less poor, or even middle-income group, leaving the poor homeless as before. The failure of government housing projects for the poor is because of unsuitable design and location, low community participation, sole

ownership by males, periodic non-availability of materials and their escalating prices, and the small number of units provided compared to the prevailing shortage. The norms and standards adopted need to be reviewed and poor people given assistance in order to improve the quality of the existing housing stock. The relationship between housing, employment, and earnings should be clearly understood and taken into account.

### **Childcare/Daycare Services**

The families of the poor all able-bodied persons, including children, have to be engaged in some form of economic activity in order to survive, be the work monetised or not.<sup>25</sup> In rural areas, children are often involved in all operations that the adults perform, though they may be scaled-down somewhat. In urban areas they often work in industrial set-ups like electronics workshops. Children are inadequately cared for, the burden on poor women workers who have to work outside their homes is intensified, and girls, especially, are deprived of even basic education. Thus, the chain of poverty, illiteracy and exploitative employment goes on. Except for a few programmes by private or voluntary agencies there are no instances of schools offering childcare for younger siblings as a support for girls in school.

Childcare is thus an urgent need since (a) the woman bears a triple burden, as worker, homemaker and mother, (b) the child suffers the double disadvantage of poverty and working parents, often within a nuclear family, and, (c) the girl child is deprived of schooling as she is often the child care-taker and home helper. Childcare is a critical component of any attempt to increase women's economic participation and involve women more fully in the development process. Many women who are now forced to accept piece rates as home-based workers (being unable to leave small children to go to a workshop or factory) would be in a position to improve their economic status.

Existing daycare services for young children of working mothers may be grouped under three heads: statutory, voluntary, and public. Legislation that provide for creches for women workers are the Factories Act (1948), Plantation Act (1957), Mines Act (1952), Contract Labour Act (1970) and the Inter-state Migrant Workers Act (1980). The first three refer specifically to the organised sector. Observance of these is rare and the quality of services that are provided is generally poor, leading to under-utilization. In most cases the law is evaded or provision made to avoid hiring women or, if they are employed, to keep them scattered, temporary, or casual.

Childcare in the voluntary sector is chiefly through the government 'Scheme of assistance to voluntary agencies to provide creches for working/ailing mothers' launched in 1974. Creches for poor working women in the unorganised sector are run with financial assistance from the Central Social Welfare Board. At present

there are only 10,000 of these, catering to about 7.5 lakh children, 0-6 years of age, though most children are 3-6 years old since creches lack the space, equipment, and trained workers for infant care. They are concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas and usually are unable to provide them services for the whole day or for the hours actually required by the working mothers. There is no evidence that mothers have been consulted and services planned to suit their needs, and funds allocated are inadequate with many procedural delays in their release.

Government-sponsored childcare is primarily through the ICDS—Integrated Child Development Services — the aim of which is to reach all children in the poverty group and, ultimately, all children in the community. Services include supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral for all children below 6 and for expectant and lactating mothers, nutrition and health education and functional literacy for women, and non-formal pre-school education for children aged 3-6 years (in Anganwadis). This scheme is highly inefficient: there is hardly any play equipment, very little and poor quality space, a worker-child ratio of one to 40 or 50, and no co-ordinations with the needs and timings of the mothers. In practice, major childcare duties may be performed by an older daughter and the mother is hardly ever in touch with the programme. Of all the services, immunisation and supplementary nutrition have had some success, while the others failed due to constraints of finance, training, personnel, time, space, and equipment; moreover, the worker is overburdened and underpaid and, therefore, poorly motivated. The Programme of Action of the National Policy on Education (1986) states that a fixed percentage of ICDS centres are to be upgraded into daycare centres but it is not known whether this process has been initiated so far.

It is imperative that childcare services are provided on a priority basis if a committed attempt is to be made to improve the conditions of poor women. For this a two-fold approach of renovation and innovation may be adopted at all times, integrating the needs of women, older daughters, and small children.

## 4. LEGISLATIVE PROTECTION

It is a fact that every woman is a worker, within the family, as well as outside the home. In the interests of patriarchy, this work is most often seen as "housework", "part time work", and "leisure time activity"; these attitudes are internalised by the women, leading to feelings of low self-esteem and low self-worth. This marginalisation of women is universal throughout the world. The world economy, as it stands today, is built on such unpaid labour and misappropriated and ruthlessly exploited natural and human resources; of these, women's labour forms a major portion. Experiences in all developing economies are dishearteningly similar : with the increased participation of their economies in the world markets, there is a compulsion to compete in profit-oriented production. Therefore costs have to be minimised and, inevitably, the axe falls on the most easily exploitable resource namely women, who are forced into production processes at the very lowest level.

Institutions of society, economics, and politics are dominated by the values of patriarchy and progress and development are evaluated in terms of asset ownership and material wealth. Women are conditioned to be continually supportive of these values while reaping only those benefits that accrue incidentally through their (women's) association with men. Modern technological production processes invariably result in increased marginalisation of the female workforce. For instance, the introduction of mechanical farm equipment has upgraded much male labour into tractor drivers or the equivalent while women are restricted to menial, physically arduous tasks such as rice transplantation. Laws relating to asset ownership and land reflect the dominant values and women have no control over their use, retention, or sale. In obtaining loans or grants as well it is rarely that officials accept women as loanees despite the much higher rate of recovery from women.

Women are traditionally isolated from each other, and their need to earn within a situation of extreme scarcity encourages them to compete with each other rather than find support through collective action. They are in the grip of an economic, social and political milieu with no avenues for escape. What is universally called for, therefore, is the empowerment of women, enabling them to participate wholly and without restrictions in the developmental process. Certain norms of growth evaluation and development will have to be drastically revised for any meaningful change to occur in national and international economics.

### **Laws Affecting Status of Women Workers**

#### **A. Labour Laws :**

Legislative protection, even if inadequate, does exist, in terms of labour laws and other general laws affecting unprotected women labour. While there



is scope for improving the contents of these laws, the basic criticism is that they are ineffective due to inadequate, or, more often, lack of enforcement of these laws.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the provisions of the law are not precise, making them a battleground for legal interpretation in the hierarchy of tribunals and courts. Penalties are inadequate and participation of the workers in the enforcement of the law is totally absent. In the context of labour laws especially, the adjudicating machinery and the magistracy are quite often indifferent, even hostile, to the aspiration of the working people, and are too far removed from the workers and their homes for them to seek recourse to these authorities without considerable loss of time and, consequently, of wages; this is, of course, in the event of their summoning up enough courage, at the risk of losing their employment or even physical intimidation, to make complaints against the employer concerned. In the case of women workers in the unorganised sector these difficulties are even more acute.

Keeping these points in view, the following general recommendations are made, inter alia, for amending the relevant acts (i.e. labour laws) suitably to give effect to these recommendations :

a. A separate wing in the labour department may be created which will have exclusive responsibility for dealing with the problems of unorganised labour. The strength and prestige of this wing will have to be commensurate with their responsibilities towards this sector which accounts for 90 per cent of the total work force; in this wing an adequate number of women functionaries — not less than 30 per cent at various levels will have to be appointed so that the problems of women workers are not ignored. All officials from the nodal department and other departments, who function as inspectors, are to have only an auxiliary role. Within the labour department it is necessary to provide in the service rules, that functionaries must have worked in the unorganised sector for a minimum period of time before they can be considered for promotions.

b. In so restructuring the administrative arrangement it will be necessary to have the functionaries (inspectors as well as authorities like the claims authorities) at levels not higher than those of the Block or Panchayat Samiti. It is also necessary to provide in the Acts and Rules that where any proceeding takes more than two hearings for final disposal and where the worker's presence is required from the third hearing onwards, the employer must pay to the worker the minimum wages for the period of each such extended hearing along with the cost of travel to and from the place of hearing even if the hearing is only for further adjournment; and exception to this provision can be made when it is incontrovertibly established that the hearings had to be extended solely due to the default of the worker.

c. Powers of inspection and consequently of filing complaints must be given to women's organisations, trade union functionaries/workers' representatives and

other women government functionaries at the village level such as ANMs, and also to individual workers in respect of defaults pertaining to them.

d. It is necessary to amend the laws to provide for a minimum fine of Rs. 500/- or a multiple, say five, of the benefits that have been denied to an individual worker, whichever is higher. Any further default should be treated as a continuing offence, visited with an additional fine of Rs. 100/- for each day of default. The deprived worker will have to be paid all her legal dues and a solatium of an equal amount along with her expenses, from out of these fines that are realised. Where complaints relate to a group of working women the above amounts will have to be correspondingly increased.

e. Likewise, the laws should be amended to provide that, in case a working woman has been discharged from work for the reason that she has preferred a complaint against her employer for non-payment of minimum wages or for violation of any provision of the relevant laws, the punishment must be compulsory imprisonment; this must be the case even where a complaint is made on her behalf by another person or by a Trade Union of which she is a member. The affected worker must be entitled to automatic reinstatement in her job without any break and with full back wages. Similarly, where the offence relates to sex discrimination, for example non-payment of equal remuneration, the present level of punishment, which is only a fine, may be enhanced to include imprisonment: the Equal Remuneration Act has surely been in the Statute book long enough to warrant stiffer penalties.

f. It is desirable to make a periodical review of the provisions of the various labour laws to see whether any of the violations must be made a cognizable offence; for example, section 22 of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 makes every offence under that Act cognizable (and bailable). Offences of a serious nature such as removal from service for complaining against the employer regarding violation of labour laws, and short measures in supply of raw material and in recording receipt of finished product, could be made cognizable.

g. Labour laws provide for trial of offences by magistrates of the first class or by a metropolitan magistrate. It would be adequate to have these offences, which deal essentially with matters which are simple and relate to questions of fact, tried by a second class magistrate who is empowered to award imprisonment upto a maximum of one year and a fine of upto a thousand rupees. The law may stipulate that notwithstanding these limits the magistrate will be empowered to levy a fine which is a multiple of the amount in default.

h. Another suggestion is that labour courts and claims authorities under the Payment of Wages/Minimum Wages Act, could also be vested with magisterial powers to try offences under the various labour laws : apart from reducing the workload on magistrates this would also have the advantage that offences are

tried by persons whose understanding of labour laws and policies is vastly superior to that of the ordinary magistracy.

i. There are provisions in various labour laws which prescribe time limits within which claims petitions or complaints have to be made, as in the proviso to Sec. 20(2) of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. These should be examined to ensure that while old and stale claims and complaints are not allowed to be agitated the time limits fixed are adequate and reasonable in view of the unorganised nature of the workforce and the special disabilities of women workers.

j. Experience has shown that all the labour laws are more honoured in their breach than in their observance. It is, therefore, essential that the burden of proof of establishing that the provisions of the Acts and Rules have been complied with must be wholly on the employer. This is a very important issue and The National Commission strongly recommends it.

k. The Uttar Pradesh Criminal Law (Composition of Offences and Abatement of Trials Amendment) Act, 1976, incorporates a new section: 22CC in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, providing for compounding of offences under the Act subject to certain limitations and conditions. This again is a device that can be examined with reference to various labour laws to see to what extent it may be desirable to provide for such compounding. This must be permitted only at a responsible level and no compounding can be permitted where the dues of the working women are not fully paid with some solatium. Provisions of Sec. 25 of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, against contracting out, give us the lead in this matter.

l. Section 66 of the Factories Act, 1948, Sec. 25 of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, Sec. 46 of the Mines Act, 1952, and Sec. 25 of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, place restrictions on employment of women during night hours. Apart from the restriction on employment of women in underground work (in mines) under Sec. 46(1) (a) of the Mines Act 1952, which need not be changed, the Commission is inclined to the view that night shifts, which are detrimental to the health of all workers, male and female, should be done away with. By working the total available capacity it should be possible to maintain and improve on the current production levels without having to work a third shift (except in continuous process industries). Where it becomes absolutely necessary to run a third shift there is no reason to restrict employment in those shifts to men; however, special safeguards and benefits may have to be provided to women workers for a long period of time to come, such as transport to and from places of work and rest room facilities. It should also be borne in mind that, unlike a male worker, a woman worker in the night shift is not able to get the necessary rest during the day time in view of the domestic responsibilities which she has to discharge. It must be noted that the requests for exemption from the restriction on employment of women during night hours which have been made by some employers, particularly those in the export processing zones,

do not emanate from any noble feelings but rather from the fact that women workers have been found by these employers to be docile and more easily exploited. The issue of the need for night shifts is therefore crucial.

m. For ensuring that the benefits intended for the workers, more particularly the women workers, under the various labour laws actually accrue to them, it becomes necessary for the women to seek redress through the established authorities like claims authorities. To help them in this effort it will be essential that adequate assistance by way of Legal Aid is made available, through the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and the agencies established under the Act. The proposed Equal Opportunities Commission may be entrusted with the task of periodically issuing guidelines to the Legal Aid agencies and others interested in this area of work.

Having made these procedural and substantive recommendations it is suggested that an omnibus legislation is undertaken to amend all the relevant laws on these lines instead of bringing in piecemeal amendments to each of the laws. These recommendations do not relate exclusively to women workers but the National Commission believes that legislative changes on the lines indicated above will ultimately benefit women workers more, as they are the more disadvantaged sector, even in this unorganised mass of the work force.

Individual labour laws will now be examined and specific recommendations made.

**a. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 :** This is by far the most relevant and important piece of legislation for the unorganised sector as the whole scheme of the Act is designed precisely for them. Without going into details about the ineffective nature of its implementation, with particular reference to women workers, the following recommendations are made.

(i) The Act, as it stands now, merely provides a mechanism for fixing and revising minimum rates of wages but does not give any guidelines as to the basis on which this is to be done. It is recommended that the basic minimum needs of the worker and his/her family for sustenance should be kept in view so as to enable him/her to cross the poverty line. It is necessary to point out that at the current levels of minimum rates of wages notified under the Act for all scheduled employments, both by the Central and the State Governments, the total annual family income will be below the poverty line (the poverty line in rural areas is at Rs. 6,400/- as the annual household income at 1985 prices).

(ii) Payment, particularly in agriculture, can be partly in cash, and partly in kind in the form of food grains, with the specific option of the worker concerned to receive part of the wages in kind. When payment is in kind utmost care must be taken to ensure correct quantities and the right quality. The prices

at which the foodgrains are valued must be the wholesale prices at the nearest mandi or the subsidised prices at which these are supplied in programmes like 'Food for Work'. A variant of this could be payment of wages wholly in cash with arrangements made at the village level for sale of foodgrains and other essential commodities at subsidised prices.

(iii) In notifying wages under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, it is seen that in some notifications, the work is classified as "light work usually done by women" and "heavy work usually done by men"; this is, to say the least, most objectionable and is only a device to circumvent the law and at the same time perpetuate the earlier practice where women workers' wages were fixed at lower levels than those for men workers. This must stop and specific occupations must be listed out and minimum rates of wages notified against them, so that it is possible to verify whether women-related occupations are being ranked lower in the matter of wages, and to take action, if necessary.

(iv) In quite a large number of scheduled employments and occupations thereunder the practice is to fix minimum rates of wages on the basis of piece-rates. In determining the output no scientific or equitable procedure is followed, resulting in women workers, particularly those in homebased occupations; having to put in very long hours of work supplemented by the efforts of other members of the family, to earn a pittance of a wage which may be a fraction of the time-rated wage; also, for reasons beyond their control or comprehension, sufficient raw materials are not issued to them to enable them to earn more piece-rated wages. Without going into the problems caused by short weighments, arbitrary rejections, etc., for which the Commission recommends provisions as in Sec. 39(2) of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, the following procedure is recommended. First, the fixation of piece-rates must be specified with reference to what an ordinary adult woman can produce or achieve in a period of eight hours of work and that output must entitle her to earn what would be the minimum time-rate wages per day in that employment and in any other comparable scheduled employment. Other matters to be kept in view while working out the output and rates are that protective equipments are used (which are often not worn due to not being supplied or being considered a hindrance to quicker work and more output), and time spent in collection of raw material and returning the finished product.

Next, where wages are fixed and paid on piece-rates, there must invariably be a fall-back wage which may be, say, 75 per cent of the time-rated wages; this wage must be paid to the women workers even if the output is low due to raw materials not being supplied or for any other reason beyond the control of the worker. A related concept is the payment of a retaining allowance to workers during the off-season in intermittent types of employment, such as in brick kilns, papad making and other food processing and canning jobs. There is also a need for enrolling or registering every one of these workers on the

register of the employers; the practice of recording the names of the males in the family (father, husband or son) must stop.

(v) The fall-back wage and/or retaining allowance may not be easy to implement in agriculture by individual farmers who may have no work to provide, as also in some other scheduled employments. It is recommended that a scheme of employment guarantee should be implemented; this will ensure adequate earnings to unorganised women workers and also enhance their bargaining strength. This scheme must be drawn up in consultation with the village people taking into account the available local resources and the local needs, and rather than be restricted to jobs like stone-breaking and earth work, should include areas like health, literacy and rural housing. Women workers should be actively involved in formulation as well as implementation.

(vi) Excepting handloom, most home-based workers are women. It is seen that the employer is saved from incurring various expenses, infrastructural and supervisory. It will therefore not be unreasonable to suggest that the home worker be recompensed to an extent. The National Commission recommends, therefore, that a premium of 25 per cent of the notified minimum rate of wages, either time rate or piece-rate, is paid to the home-workers to compensate for this, which will count as wages, for all purposes, including leave wages, bonus, gratuity, workmen's compensation, and social security.

(vii) Ensuring prompt and complete payment of minimum rates of wages is of paramount importance in raising the levels of living of these workers. It is, therefore, essential that protests by workers in support of demands for payment of notified wages should not be seen as problems relating to maintenance of law and order or public peace or national security or the like.

(viii) The Commission is distressed to learn that quite a few state governments have, of late, been liberal in the use of the powers of exceptions granted to them under section 26 of the Minimum Wages Act, to keep wages for drought relief work at about 80 per cent of the notified minimum rates of wages. This is notwithstanding the decision of the Supreme Court of India in the Rajasthan case where the Rajasthan Finance Relief Workers Employees (Exemption from Labour Laws) Act, 1964 was struck down. The National Commission cannot sufficiently strongly condemn this and emphatically recommends that provisions in the Act for grant of exemption be deleted.

(ix) At present minimum rates of wages are fixed/revised in respect of jobs which are included in the schedule. Section 27 of the Act empowers the appropriate government to add employments to the schedule, but there still remain certain employments which are not added, and there are time lags in the fixation of minimum rates of wages for employments that are added and therefore other benefits for employments that are added also get held up. It is suggested, therefore,

that a national or at least regional minimum wage/s is/are fixed and this rate, which will have to be periodically revised, be published through all media.

(x) In setting up advisory boards and committees for fixing/revising minimum rates of wages, there must be at least one member to represent the interests of women workers in the former and not less than two women workers in the latter.

**b. The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 :** Apart from not being properly implemented, a disturbing trend is the increasing numbers of women workers in the manufacturing sector on a contract basis. In quite a few major establishments work which was previously done 'departmentally' is now being got done by contractors. The Commission believes that this situation stems from the inability of the workers and their organisations to raise an industrial dispute on the demand for abolition of the contract labour system, as they used to before the commencement of the Act. Thus workers are at the mercy of the appropriate government which is often tardy in even constituting the Advisory Boards, let alone consulting them and taking a decision, as envisaged in Sec. 10 of the Act. The Supreme Court judgement will have to be revised or the matter legislatively corrected.

It may also be provided in the law that when the system of contract labour is abolished the principal employer must take all the affected contract labour in his direct employment, as the purpose of abolishing contract labour is concerned. It will be useful to draft the definition of the term 'employee', as has been done in the Madhya Pradesh Industrial Relations Act, 1960, and the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946, to include a person employed by a contractor to do any work for him in the execution of a contract with the employer within the meaning of subclause (e) of clause 14: this subclause reads as follows : "Employer includes ... (e) where the owner of any undertaking in the course of or for the purpose of conducting the undertaking contracts with any person for the execution by or under the contractor of the whole or any part of any work which is ordinarily part of the undertaking, the owner of the undertaking." Paragraph 14.9 in the chapter on the Factories Act, 1948, in the Report of the (Gujarat) Labour Laws Review Committee (1974) headed by justice D. A. Desai is relevant in this connection. This matter will be further elaborated in the section on the problems of home-based workers.

**c. The Inter State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 :** This Act is almost a non-starter. When the administration is indifferent in implementing labour laws pertaining to labour from within the State it is not surprising that the problems of the inter-state migrant worker do not receive any attention at all, excepting in those odd cases that hit the courts. To improve the contents of the Act it is suggested that the contractor must set up or cause to be set up grocery shops at the workspot

so that the workers, more particularly the women workers, do not have to go long distances for buying their daily requirements. The prices of the goods sold must be subsidised and the local administration must be required to inspect these shops to ensure that the workers are not exploited.

A suggestion has been made that all workers working in another state, irrespective of whether they are recruited by a contractor as required by the Act or not should be brought under the purview of this Act. This will, if accepted, go counter to the entire scheme of the Act which seeks to regulate employment by the principal employer of persons from another state through a contractor who recruits these persons for ultimate employment by the principal employer.

d: **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961** : The National Commission notes that a Bill has recently been introduced in Parliament for amendments to the Act; it endorses the proposals in the Bill.

One of the points often urged as the reason for decrease in employment of women is the incidence of maternity benefits and the consequent reluctance of the employer to hire women workers. Whatever may be the motivations and causes, it is necessary that the burden of maternity benefits in respect of women employees be borne by all the employers and not only by an individual employer who has women in his or her own establishment, as is the case in establishments covered under the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948. For this purpose it is recommended that on the lines already proposed by the National Commission on Labour, a Central Fund be established out of which the benefits may be provided. All employers should pay to this fund a percentage of the total wages (of both men and women workers) as monthly contributions. The fund may be controlled and administered by the ESI, or by the appropriate welfare funds. Consistent with this approach, it is not necessary to prescribe any qualifying period of service to enable a woman worker to obtain maternity benefits.

In addition, the coverage under the Act must be made universal along with strengthening and widening the administrative structure of the ESI Corporation adequately. The National Commission also unhesitatingly recommends that where it is not possible to extend maternity benefits to the working women through a special fund as discussed above, the responsibility for providing this benefit will devolve on the state governments. The existing practice in some states of providing maternity benefits to women agricultural labour will only have to be extended to cover all adult women. The Commission does not think it necessary or proper to restrict these benefits to only three confinements for each woman; it is convinced, rather, that the emphasis on a small family norm will be better served by improved maternity and childcare. The funds that are spent on 'family planning' can be better spent on providing these vital services. In keeping with the Commission's view that maternity benefits and childcare be regarded as a package, the name of the Act may be changed to Maternity Assistance Act.



These are crucial elements in dealing with the problems of women workers, as compared with those of men workers. Except for a miniscule proportion of adult women who may not be doing any socially productive work, all Indian women, especially those in rural areas, spend long hours each day in such work, quite apart from their inevitable domestic chores. For maternity benefits to be meaningful they must be supplemented by appropriate childcare which will facilitate the older children's enrolment in and attending of school, the importance of which cannot be overemphasized, given the positive impact of literacy on all spheres of life.

e. **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976** : Even after ten years, this Act has had almost no effect, and the provisions of this Act are still not widely known. A massive educational programme utilizing radio and television is imperative for emphasising that this law is applicable universally — to all sectors, even including domestic service. A suggestion received and endorsed by the Commission is that at all governmental functions, particularly in rural areas, there must be brief announcements regarding the prevailing rates of minimum wages in agriculture, construction, etc. as also about the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act.

There have been suggestions that equal remuneration must be payable for doing work of equal value, rather than "some work or work of a similar nature" as defined in Sec. 2 (h) of the Act. The National Commission believes that the former is much more difficult to ensure than the latter and notes a tendency, even at present, to categorize tasks generally done by women as being of a slightly inferior nature, warranting lower rates of wages, even in the fixation of minimum rates of wages. To avoid this it will be advantageous if a group of activities in any industrial occupation are broad-banded into one category on the basis of enquiries and study.

To strengthen the trends of women getting trained in non-traditional trades the National Commission recommends that in all such trainings in ITIs (private and government-run), preference be given to women candidates with an absolute minimum reservation of 15 per cent for women candidates. It is also suggested that, for the next ten years or more, the prescribed qualifications may be relaxed for women and special steps taken in the ITIs to give additional coaching to the women candidates to make up their initial deficiency. The Commission recommends similar arrangements in respect of various trades under the Apprentices Act, 1961, and also in other programmes for training, to make up for the neglect of the past. A special case is that of girls in plantations who are not educated beyond the primary level as they form a captive labour force; the state governments must pay special attention to this.

Another matter that the National Commission would like to draw attention to relates to advertisements that appear regularly in newspapers of job vacancies which specify that women need not apply. A few prosecutions of such cases,

including that of the publishers of the newspapers, and adequate media publicity against this will help in doing away with this phenomenon. It is also necessary to devise measures by which the existing situation of reduction of employment of women in certain traditional industries like textiles and mining is corrected, and to introduce safeguards against technological changes which invariably have adverse effects on women's employment. With regard to the first issue, the provision of prior approval of retrenchment in Sec. 25 N of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, must apply to all establishments irrespective of size in terms of employment, and nature, especially for female workers. Also, the principle of last come-first go in Sec. 25 G of the Industrial Disputes Act may be made inapplicable to women employees.

As regards the second issue, while all technological improvements and changes that reduce women's drudgery and improve health status are to be welcomed, those that affect women employment adversely will have to be most critically scrutinised. A more effective and purposive use of Sec. 9 A (notice of change) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, will have to be made and the relevant schedule made explicit to include all such changes as would reduce employment, more particularly those of women workers. The technology policy, its implications for employment conservation and generation, especially for women, will have to be reformulated, with the considerations indicated above held paramount. The Equal Opportunities Commission recommended by the National Commission should make these matters its special concern.

It is also suggested that Sec. 16 of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 be deleted as it is redundant : it empowers the concerned government to make declarations that the differences with regard to recommendation are based on a factor other than sex, while under this Act, differences in remuneration are anyway supposed to be based on a factor other than sex.

**f. Plantation Labour Act, 1951 :** This Act is of special relevance to women workers as they comprise 50 per cent of the workforce in plantations.

In Sec. (ee) of the Act, the parents of a male worker are to be considered as his dependents; this should apply to parents of female workers as well. It is also recommended that similar amendments be made in all other enactments where the issue arises.

Sec. 10 (2) of the Act, dealing with medical facilities, states that if the prescribed facilities are not provided and maintained in any plantation the Chief Inspector of Plantations can cause these facilities to be provided and maintained and recover the cost thereof from the defaulting employer. The Kerala State Amendment to the law provides, under Sec. 18A of the Act, that similar action may be taken in the case of drinking water, conveyance, creches, housing, canteens, educational facilities, and facilities like umbrellas, blankets, and raincoats. These

provisions may be included in the main Act so as to make this uniformly applicable to all states. The National Commission also recommends that in other labour legislations which prescribe certain welfare facilities, the relevant inspector be similarly empowered. The same principle can also be extended to protective equipment. In addition, based on the findings of the Task Force on Health, that the majority of occupational health problems of women workers are pastoral in origin, it is suggested that the work methods and arrangements be changed; these changes can be incorporated in the laws and regulations and the Chief Inspector or Inspector empowered, as mentioned above, to provide these.

g. **Workmen's Compensation Act, 1932** : Sec. 2 (1) (n) of the Act which defines the term 'workmen' excludes from its ambit a person whose employment is of a casual nature. The commission recommends that this 'exclusion' be deleted. Schedule 11 to the Act lists those who are to be included; in many cases applicability depends on the number of persons employed, or even the number of persons a ferry boat is capable of carrying. These restrictions on numbers have no place in social security legislation and may be removed; the coverage under the Act must be universal. This is in consonance with the suggestion made further on to the effect that the employer must compulsorily take out an insurance policy or that compensation must be paid out of a Central Fund. The Act may be amended suitably to place the burden of proof squarely on the employer in the case of an accident. Likewise, the medical expert's certificate on the nature of injury and extent of disablement must be admitted in evidence, leaving it to the employer to summon the expert at his own cost for purposes of cross examination.

It is also recommended that the list of occupational diseases enumerated in Schedule 111 to the Act may be expanded to include other diseases like TB and loss of vision, and the procedure for doing so, under Sec. 3, be simplified. The law must also be amended so as to compel the employer to retain in service a worker who has suffered partial disablement consequent on an employment injury, in a task suited to her ability, and at emoluments she was drawing at the time of the accident. Where disability is total the employer must, in addition to compensation, give her retrenchment compensation on the scale prescribed in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1942, and also meet the cost of medical care and treatment for a period of, say, five years, after her services are terminated.

An interesting suggestion made to the National Commission proposes that in the case of an accident resulting in the death or disability of a woman worker the scale of compensation payable must be more than what is payable under the law for a male worker in order to compensate for the loss of her housekeeping functions. This principle may be accepted and a minimum percentage of 25 (of the woman's normal wages) may be adopted to begin with; this amount may be subject to discussion. Further it is recommended that all employees be compelled by law to take out Accident Insurance Policies or that the payment

of Workmen's Compensation be out of a Central Fund to which all the employers pay a monthly contribution calculated at a certain percentage of the wages.

h. **Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service), Act, 1966:** This is the only labour enactment other than the Minimum Wages Act which deals with home workers, in a detailed manner. It is particularly relevant as the bulk of the home workers in bidi rolling are women. Implementation is, as usual, unsatisfactory. It must, however, be admitted that the very existence of the law has encouraged formation of trade unions among workers in the bidi rolling industry and this has also led to demands for similar laws for homeworkers in other occupations and industries.

The main deficiency in implementation, and the root of all other defaults in implementation is the reluctance and failure on the part of the 'employer' to register these women workers in his books and to issue the identity card and log book. As a result they do not get the benefits that should accrue to them under the law. An interesting feature of the law is contained in Sec. 39 of the Act which, in sub-section 2 provides for an authority to settle disputes between an employer and employee relating to issue of raw materials, rejection of bidis and payment of wages for rejected bidis; this provision takes note of the sort of disputes that may occur at the local level and seeks to provide a summary remedy for their settlement. It is necessary that the authority to whom such disputes can be referred by the worker is not further away than the Block or Panchayat Samiti. Headquarters, the appellate authority, referred to in sub-section 3 of Sec. 39, should also not be further than the sub-divisional headquarters.

Besides this Act there are two allied legislations, viz, the Bidi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976, and the Bidi Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1976 : these provide for levy of cess on manufactured bidi and for provision of welfare facilities with the help of the Fund so created. There does not appear to be any close relationship between the working of the fund and the implementation of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act, 1966. Both laws must be better administered. To ensure that all eligible employees are issued identity cards, which are essential to establish an employer-employee relationship, it is suggested that Rule 41 of the Bidi Welfare Fund Rules, 1978 be amended to enable the State Government or any other accredited organisation to also issue identity cards. Release of funds to the various State Governments from out of the Welfare Fund could be on the basis of the total number of workers registered in each state under the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service), Act, 1966.

i. **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 :** This recent enactment, which repealed the Employment of Children Act, 1938, seeks to prohibit employment of children in certain tasks and regulate their conditions of work in certain other employments. A 'child' is defined as one who is below

the child to supplement the meagre household income. The result of this is that piece-rated wages are fixed very low in the full knowledge that the home-based worker, in particular, who is more often than not a woman, will be 'assisted' by other members of her family, especially the children. Particularly when the child is a girl this results in her being prevented from going to school, leading to the inevitable cycle of no education, low skills, and low earning capacity, thus perpetuating home-based work with its exploitatively low wages. This vicious trap will have to be broken in two ways — one, by so fixing the price rate, as indicated earlier under the section on the Minimum Wages Act, that it enables the worker to earn a reasonable wage for an eight-hour work-day; and, two, by prohibiting child labour totally and, at the same time, enforcing the constitutional mandate of compulsory universal elementary education. The Commission's recommendation regarding provision of childcare facilities, will also obviate the need for keeping the elder children at home to look after their infant siblings. It is significant to point out that in Kerala, where daily earnings of the mother in agriculture and construction is adequate, there is no incidence of child labour. The National Commission therefore recommends that child labour be prohibited in toto in our country by 2000 AD in a phased manner, so that each year sees the prohibition of child labour in one or more occupations. This is not to say that a child should not learn at home the crafts and trades of her parents, but that she should do this as a learner and a student, not as a wage earner, at the cost of her schooling.

j. **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976** : The amount of money available to each family for rehabilitation after release from bondage is so inadequate as to drive them back into a concealed bondage. The Commission believes that rehabilitation must be through wage employment, if possible under the erstwhile employer himself, for doing the same work as he was earlier doing with payment of the occupational wage or, at least, the notified minimum wage, on a regular basis. Where there are adequate numbers of released labourers in a specified location the possibility of collectively rehabilitating them on land available, must be explored.

**Home-based women workers** : These workers can be broadly classified into two categories : piece-rated home-based workers working for an employer and own-account small entrepreneurs or small artisans, the former being predominant. It is felt that the nature of legislative protection needed for these two categories is not the same, and own-account workers need remedies that generally lie beyond the scope of labour laws, such as better arrangements for purchase of raw material, for marketing, and for credit.<sup>2</sup> This section is, therefore, confined to home-based, piece-rated women workers; the problems of own-account women workers will be considered in the next section on general laws.

While the National Commission agrees that it is not necessary or desirable for the legislative framework for protection of home-based piece-rated workers

to incorporate an approach on home-based work itself it does feel that home-based workers must have a genuine free choice as to their place of work, presupposing the provision of all necessary facilities and infrastructure.

After earnest consideration the Commission concluded that these workers need a new law specific to their needs, which would give them greater visibility and avoid the vexatious question of employer-employee relationship tests by focusing on control over the production process and the ultimate product instead. Considering the experiences with the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act, 1966 it was concluded that the new law should provide for Tripartite Boards, on the pattern of the Dock Labour Board or Mathadi Boards, for the following reasons :

- o A Board takes over responsibility for implementation and enforcement while a protective act like Bidi Act divides these functions between the employers and the government machinery respectively
- o The Board replaces the employer-employee question by a group relationship between the corpora of the employers and of the workers under the aegis of the Board
- o A Tripartite Board will enable security of employment to be provided to the workers which an Act of the protective type cannot
- o A Tripartite Board, on which the workers will have a position of authority and responsibility, will ensure them benefits as well as the visibility they lack and which none of the laws have helped them gain

Taking note of the difficulties such a Board would have to face and surmount, the Commission considers that the law should be developed so as to enable the Board to take on functions in a phased mannner.

Broadly, the Commission envisages the law to contain provisions relating to safety, welfare, and working conditions on the lines of the usual protective legislations. The Tripartite Boards will consist of the Government, the employers and an equal number of representatives of workers of whom the majority will be women, whose functions will include registration of employees and workers, regulation of employment, and responsibility for payment of wages and for provision of other benefits, for which purpose it will obtain funds either as advance deposit or levy from the employers; a rough calculation shows that about 36 per cent of the wages will have to be collected additionally from the employers.

The Board will have the powers to inspect, to prescribe, and call for returns and information, to prosecute, and to de-register employees and workers should the need arise. Home-based trades and occupations will be listed in the Schedule

the need arise. Home-based trades and occupations will be listed in the schedule to which additions can be made by the appropriate Government by notification. The Board will be authorised to draw up schemes for the various categories of trades/occupations, subject to appeal by the appropriate Government. The Board will be enabled to set up Tripartite bodies at the local levels in respect of specific trades/occupations. The board will also be empowered to set up Tripartite/appellate bodies to deal with disputes, if any, between the employers and the workers.

While the Act will be a Central Act enacted by Parliament, the State Governments will be enforcing the provisions of the law. The law may provide for a Central Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of the various state level Advisory Committees of the State-level Boards and the Central Government. The law may also provide for special sanctions like attachment of stocks, suspension of licences, and withdrawal of other facilities like quotas and bank loans in respect of recalcitrant employers.

While the establishment of Boards and drawing up of Schemes may take some time the provisions of the Act relating to welfare may be worked through the normal Government machinery until the Board is able to take over these functions. However, the first task will have to be the complete enumeration of all workers and all employers including contractors, trade or occupation-wise. To ensure that workers entering into a 'sale purchase' arrangement are not left out of the reckoning of workers, the law may define workers on the lines of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966.

The Commission also suggests that the draft Bill prepared by the Government be widely circulated to all State Governments, voluntary organisations, trade unions, academic institutions, and other interested bodies for extensive consultation before it ultimately reaches the statute book.

**Construction workers :** A separate sub-sector is being devoted to this category of workers not merely because of their number, over ten per cent of whom are women, but because of the peculiar nature of their problems.<sup>3</sup> They work under an employer or, more often, under a contractor or his sub-contractor for short periods and move from one employer to another as also from one location to another, with no guarantee of continued employment. These workers' problems can be tackled only if there is regulation of both the employees and the workers in the industry and the entire responsibility entrusted to Tripartite Boards. A private Members Bill has already been introduced in the Lok Sabha on the subject. A National Campaign Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer has been formed for perusing the matter of getting the law enacted. The National Commission endorses this as the only effective way of ensuring benefits to the workers. Women workers should be adequately represented in the Tripartite Boards at various levels.

## **B. General Laws Affecting the Status of Women**

Women workers practise their trade or profession based on traditional skills or those acquired through long years of experience and hard work. However, the general laws as well as the administration fail to recognise them as a productive labour force, take away their traditional rights and access to natural resources, deny them the benefits due to them and harass them in the course of their work, as well; they are discouraged from voicing their grievances and getting unionised. Hence amendments and new laws are necessary.

a. **Forest Laws** : The tribals who traditionally utilised forest resources in a limited fashion since time immemorial have been marginalised and the department, in total neglect of the forest, has allowed unlimited cutting of trees and extraction of forest produce to profit the commercial and industrial interests.<sup>4</sup> The tribals, who have the knowledge and experience, have no say in the manner forests are being utilised, and have been reduced to exploited wage labour. It is suggested that a comprehensive Minor Forest Produce Workers Act be enacted along the lines of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, so that the working conditions are regulated, social security and accident compensation are provided, and piece-rates fixed in consultation with labour representatives. Violation of the Minimum Wages Act should be made a cognisable offence and workers should be protected against victimisation. There should be a time limit for the disposal of claims petitions and mobile courts should visit remote areas on fixed days. All this would imply, as it should in all fairness, that these women who collect minor forest produce are actually the workers under the contractors and/or the forest departments and not merely sub-contractors. Cane and bamboo workers should be treated as a priority sector. They should be able to get a licence quickly and easily by simply paying a fee, and sale of bamboo to the paper industry should stop and the workers provided with bamboo or cane at concessional rates.

In fact, the forest department must involve the tribals, especially the women, in running its affairs; there should be a Board to facilitate this. Land should be allotted to firewood collectors to grow and cut fuel-wood trees under the Social Forestry Scheme. Suitable amendments to the Indian Forest Act may be made.

### **b. Women and Land/Agriculture**

i. **Displacements and Land Acquisition Act** : The Land Acquisition Act is violated very often by the Administration itself which takes possession of the land even before the formalities are completed. More seriously, the cash compensation given has little value. Depriving a person of agricultural land takes away the employment opportunity that the woman has by working on the land. This aspect of the whole question must be uppermost in deciding whether land



is to be acquired at all for a public purpose or not. In granting alternate lands the title must be jointly in the name of the woman and her spouse, even if it was not so originally.

It must be mandatory that the affected people be consulted, properly informed of consequences and alternatives, and the impact of the project reviewed before the final decision is taken.

It is, essentially, necessary to review the concept of development which treats high technology and sophisticated production as progressive while subsistence agriculture, on which lakhs of people survive, is denigrated and ignored.

**ii. Pauperisation of Peasantry and Position of Women in Agriculture :** In the agricultural sector there is increased pauperisation due to its integration into market economy, concentration of land in a few hands, and depletion of water resources.<sup>5,6</sup> Men are forced to migrate from rural areas to nearby towns and survival becomes very difficult for the women and children left behind in the village. Tenancy laws do not recognize the woman's labour and only the male is considered the tenant. Since ownership of land is in male hands, the woman is denied credit. She may own land in her native village, but cannot use it as security after marriage, when she moves to her husband's village. Credit facilities must be available for women either without security or with land in her native village as security.

Provisions of employment in all states for providing jobs which are suitable to local skills, conditions and needs, is imperative in today's situation. All types of work including childcare, wasteland development and irrigation works must be organised, while ensuring payment of minimum wages, equal remuneration and provision of employment cards with details of work. The problems of bonded labour is widespread. Problems faced by women agricultural labour are denial of equal and minimum wages, victimisation for lodging complaints and unionising, travel costs, and loss of earnings in the off-season. The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act may be extended and implemented for the whole country.

The Land Ceiling Act, which could have led to agricultural prosperity and equality, has been thwarted by :

- o benami land holdings through transactions after the bill
- o sale of land to tenants
- o declarations of agricultural lands as plantations, orchards, etc
- o formation of trusts, co-operatives, etc

The proper implementation of the law, by nullifying all the sales after the introduction of the Bill in the Legislatures, distribution of surplus lands to the rural poor in joint names, and provision of house sites with pattas in joint names, would go a long way.

**Fishing :** The Marine Fishing Regulation Act is being violated constantly by the mechanised sector and there is not much strength in the law anyway.<sup>7</sup> Violation must be made a cognisable offence, trawling at night should be banned, and the catamaran fisherfolk must have the right to inspect and prosecute under the law. Traditional fishing in coastal areas has been affected by trawling and tourism, while the fishing rights of inland fisherfolk have been affected by a system of contracts that exists in small towns, villages relating to fishing in ponds and tanks. Moreover fish resources are being depleted and destroyed due to overfishing.

The women workers need to be protected during pregnancy, child birth and old age. Schemes to provide women with social security, work places, equipments, and licences, and to protect the rights of the traditional fisherfolk, must be implemented, with representatives from the workers involved in evolving as well as implementing the scheme.

**Vendors, craftswomen in the cities :** Municipal authorities and the police consider vending and craft carried on in the streets as obstructions.<sup>8</sup> Workers face tremendous problems, from confiscation of goods, to litigation and extortion. The Municipal definition of a hawker is one who is moving and selling, so those who display their wares on roadsides and pavements are easy prey.

It is important to note that while the government is not providing employment for all people, these women take the initiative organising petty vending or craft and provide necessities for the public at very reasonable costs and locations, sometimes even down to door. Licensing should be made simple, as in the case of radio licences. The licence could be in at least two names, including the next of kin. Rag pickers must be recognised as labour and protected against merchants, and the selling price fixed by the municipal authorities; they should also provide schemes for the vendors in terms of creches, social security, workplaces and reasonable prices for new materials. Representatives of the women must be involved in framing and implementing the schemes. Town Planning must take into account vending lanes on the roads so that traffic need not be obstructed.

Another major area relates to pavement and slum dwellers, many of whom are hawkers or vendors, or domestic workers. The present policy of eviction and demolition followed by, though rarely, resettlement in highly unsuitable, remote areas, causes incalculable harm and distress.

**Cooperative Laws:** The Cooperative Law exists at each level except the Multi-state Cooperative Societies Act.<sup>9</sup> Most States vie with each other for being the most anti-cooperative. The laws have provided unlimited powers to the Registrar for registration, framing bye-laws, elections, appointment of staff, and investment of funds, and he/she can, therefore, interfere in the running of the society and can even supersede the elected committee and appoint members and thus control the cooperative and kill the cooperative spirit. The corruption within the cooperative department and harassment methods adopted by its officials are also well known.

So for the illiterate women workers to cooperate and improve their conditions, it is necessary to ensure that

- o registration is a simple affair within a time frame and existence of another cooperative with a few of the aims being similar or area of operation of the proposed society overlapping with another, must not be given as excuses for the refusal and the concept of the so-called minimum share is to be scrapped
- o the Registrar cannot remove elected members or supersede the elected committee
- o staff appointments, pay scales, and auditors are to be approved by the general body
- o the manner of application for funds is to be decided by the general body
- o compulsory reorganisation is to be given up
- o corrupt officials are to be severely punished
- o cooperatives not following cooperative principles are to be severely punished

Keeping in view the delays experienced in getting cooperatives registered it is worth considering whether a scheme of provisional registration within a month of the application being made can be incorporated in the law.

**Laws on sexual harassment of women by employers/officials :** Women workers are sexually harassed in urban, rural, and forest areas — that is, everywhere. Sexual exploitation is normally by the employers, officials, or anti-social elements. The new rape law has amended the Evidence Act only for custodial rape but it is necessary that in all cases of rape and assault faced by women from employers and officials, the woman's statement be taken as sufficient proof while the onus should be on the accused to prove his innocence.

**Other safeguards — Property laws, desertion, widowhood and maintenance, prohibition :** The women should have equal rights to ancestral property and even after marriage, she should be able to claim it as and when she requires it. Also, the property acquired after marriage must be in joint names and she must have the right to matrimonial property when she is deserted, divorced, or widowed. The government should give preference to widows and destitute women for governmental jobs, redistribution of land, and in providing house sites for the houseless.

One of the most serious, if not the most serious, problems faced by women workers is drunkenness on the part of their husbands. The consequences of this on the women are such as wife-beating, reduced if not non-contribution towards the family upkeep by the husband out of his earnings, even depriving the woman of her meagre earnings, and inculcating the habit of drink in the children and also in the women. The need for state revenues should not lead the government to view 'Prohibition' unkindly. At least there must be total restriction on the production and sale of hard liquor. In the short run, the number of retail outlets should be reduced, number of days for sale reduced, location of outlets carefully selected, complete restriction of sale on pay day, payment of wages at least partly in kind, and consultation with women's representatives on the opening of retail outlets and their location.

Drug addiction, which is becoming a serious menace, calls for similar preventive action.

### **Major areas of focus**

**Technology and self-employed women :** The question of the effects of the introduction of new technology is a highly complex one. In order to judge the actual effect of a particular technology a multi-level, multi-dimensional study would have to be undertaken. Therefore this discussion is restricted to technology which affects work processes in which self-employed women are involved in terms of laws self-employed women have so far been affected and how negative effects can be scaled down and the positive effects increased.

**Displacement of self-employed women :** Displacement has been the greatest negative effect, occurring in a variety of ways, as below :

- o direct displacement, occurring when new machines or new processes are brought in to do work mechanically that the workers were doing manually
- o displacement by takeover of market, when machine-produced goods replace those produced traditionally by small producers and artisans

- o displacement by takeover of raw materials as happens when the raw material sources for small producers are taken over by mechanised sectors
- o displacement by destruction of the environment

The effects of displacement on women are more than those on men because, firstly, the types of work which are the first to be mechanised are precisely those unskilled, manual jobs that women are usually involved in; secondly, since women are not included in skill-training they are not reabsorbed after mechanisation; and, lastly, women's employment is rarely defended by trade unions, and quite often even sacrificed.

**Other issues relating to technology :** Apart from displacement, technology may also bring about

- o a higher production level
- o a higher income level
- o a change (positive or negative) in the health status of the worker
- o a change (reduction or increase) in the drudgery of the worker

All these issues should be used as criteria in the evaluation of a technology. It must be emphasized that the direction in which the work process is desired to be altered determines the direction of technological research: the main question is, therefore, whose needs are determining technological directions? If it is the self-employed workers' needs they should be reflected in the choice of technology, and the direction of technological research; present trends reveal quite the opposite.

The Commission therefore recommends that

- o All new technologies should be screened by a high-powered committee from the point of view of the workers. Self-employed women should be an important component of this committee. Criteria for screening should be
  - (i) employment potential
  - (ii) income accruing to work
  - (iii) effect on dependency
  - (iv) effect on health

- o Technologies resulting in large unemployment should be banned
- o Beneficial technologies should be encouraged through tax rebates, etc
- o The direction of research and development should be determined by the above committee
- o Within the framework of policy, the Equal Opportunities Commission will have the authority to advise, investigate, and decide all matters relating to various kinds of work

**Employment guarantee :** The objects of the Commission's exercise are to ameliorate the conditions of poor working women as well as to empower the woman to come into her own; the latter will be best achieved if we can create conditions under which she can earn a reasonable wage for her day's work and she can work all the days that she is available and willing to work. The National Commission, therefore, recommends that the 'right to work' which now figures as a Directive Principle of state policy in our Constitution should be included as Fundamental Right; this should be followed by a Central Legislation guaranteeing employment to all adults who need employment and are willing to work. The planning and implementing mechanisms need to be wholly revamped so as to reflect local initiative, local resources — both human and natural — and local needs; thus the local people, particularly the women, should have a predominant voice.

**Organisation for the self-employed :** It is generally agreed that unless a group is organised it will not be able to obtain any genuine improvement in its condition. At present the self-employed sector, or 88 per cent of the workforce, is unorganised and unable to assert itself. Thus, even progressive legislation has often had no impact due to non-implementation; the exceptions to this prove that the law is useful as an instrument of change for the self-employed, but only where they are organised, as are the forest workers of Gujarat and the fisher people in Kerala.

On the other hand, the law can also be used as a tool to help build up the organisations of the self-employed : this strategy has the advantage that the demands of the organisation remain strictly legal and it becomes more difficult for the authorities to suppress such movements. The organisation itself may or may not have a legal structure. The advantage of having such unregistered groups are

- o they remain informal and flexible
- o there is no external interference

- o self-employed, illiterate women feel more comfortable and in control when there are no formal procedures to be followed

Some disadvantages are

- o when the immediate need for which the workers have come together is satisfied the organisation breaks up
- o an informal group is unable to build up an identity independent of its more active members, nor can it acquire capital assets
- o many government anti-poverty schemes can be obtained only through registered organisations

The different terms of organisation available to the self-employed have been explored in a study by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. An organisation can be registered as

- o a society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860
- o a trust under the Indian Trust Act, 1882 or under the Charitable and Religious Trust Act, 1920
- o a trade union under the Trade Union Act, 1926
- o a company under the Companies Act, 1956 or under Sec. 25 of the Companies Act
- o a cooperative society under the Cooperative Societies Act, (each state has its own)

The basic criteria for the most suitable organisation for self-employed women are

- o the organisation should be of the women and not merely for the women
- o it should articulate their needs and demands
- o it should be democratic and have the capacity to involve the masses of self-employed women

The two forces that best meet these criteria, in principle, are cooperatives and trade unions. In practice, there have been major problems with both: registration of a cooperative is a major hurdle, and can take up to 23 years, due to

- o discouraging provisions under Cooperative Acts

- o negative policies and inflexibility of interpretation
- o extensive paper work, which is most daunting for illiterate women
- o large-scale corruption in Cooperative Departments

Even after the cooperative is registered these same obstacles lead to constraints in democratic and effective functioning. A women's cooperative faces the additional problem that the men in the community try to push the women aside and take over.

Trade unions, until very recently, have remained mainly male-dominated and unsympathetic to the problems of women workers. Also, they have been concentrated mainly in factory-type situations where the employer-employee relationship is clear; this is partly because of the emphasis in the Trade Union Act itself. Both cooperatives and trade unions have become the power base for political parties which is antithetical to their usefulness.

**Support services :** to enable women to take advantage of the law it is necessary to provide for appropriate and adequate legal aid and advice to the women, at places as close to the women workers as possible. Special provisions must be made for this purpose by the state Governments under the Legal Services Authorities Act, supplemented by what social action group and voluntary organisations can do. One of the main thrusts of these activities must be to enable women to develop organisations on their own; this will help them to become self-reliant and confident. Wide dissemination of information on the legal provisions for the benefit of women, on development programmes and on delivery systems for women, must be made in local languages through printed publications and other media.

The Family Courts Act, 1984, has not made much headway, and a beginning as been made only in two states; this happens with much of our legislation. It is to guard against this Commission's recommendations going the same way that the setting up of a high-powered Equal Opportunities Commission has been recommended.

Maternity assistance has been discussed already; along with childcare facilities, this is the most crucial element in any worthwhile attempt to help poor women workers.

### **Equal Opportunities Commission**

The National Commission recommends very strongly the establishment of a permanent Equal Opportunities Commission, consisting of five or six persons of whom more than half should be women. Its functions will be to ensure equality

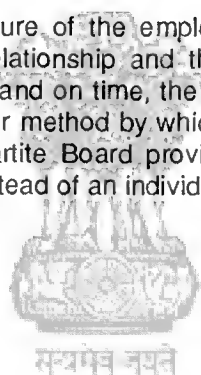


of status and opportunities for women not merely in their role as workers but in all spheres of life. In making this recommendation and in describing the scope and functions of such a Commission the National Commission has been guided somewhat by the arrangements that exist in some other countries, such as Japan, U.K., Ireland, and the USA. Such a Commission would be a watchdog organisation, with teeth, to oversee the implementation of laws and policies in all areas involving women, from conditions of work and provision of maternity and childcare facilities, to property rights.

### **New Structures : Tripartite Boards**

In a paragraph on construction workers, in the section on Labour Law, the necessity for setting up Tripartite Boards consisting of workers, employers, and government representatives has been mentioned. Similarly in the sub-section relating to home-based women workers the key element of a new law for these workers is the establishment of such bodies. This strategy was also suggested by the study groups on Forests and on Fisheries.

Given the shifting nature of the employer-employee relationships and even the denial of such a relationship and the consequent difficulty in even getting due wages paid in full and on time, the case for Tripartite Boards needs no argument. There is no other method by which the employer-employee nexus can be established, the Tripartite Board providing for a corpus of employers and a corpus of employees instead of an individual employer with his employees.



## 5. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

To understand the issue of occupational health it is necessary to make a detailed examination of women's work in terms of the actual activity undertaken, the hours of work entailed, the remuneration, if any, and the effects of all these on their nutritional status and physical as well as mental health. All working class women work, within and outside the home, whether they are wage labourers or not. In fact, if women work outside the home they are consistently working a doubleshift, and when children or other family members are ill, a triple shift, day after day. On an average, women work much longer hours than men. Their income is often the mainstay of the family's economy, and the work they do within the home is crucial to the survival of the family and, therefore, the society.

The fact that women are house-workers as well, affects their status within wage work adversely, by confining them to badly paid and marginal work, supposedly 'women's work'. Though women-headed households constitute a large proportion of households in the country the idea that their income is only 'supplementary' has become a fixed notion. Instead of enhancing women's status, each of the different roles women play work against the other; this is reflected in, among other things, the fact that many women have to work upto the last day of pregnancy and return to work within a month, endangering their own health and that of their children.

The obstacles in the way of women's development are tremendous and come from almost every institution and structure with which they are in relationship, even remotely. The net result is a breakdown of their health, mental and physical, which demoralizes them further and leaves them without the strength or will to even take advantage of the few development schemes designed for them. The fact that their nutritional status is very poor weighs against them and against their infants.

### Some common problems related to occupation in the informal sector

1. **Problems related to posture at work :** These are common to all women involved in arduous physical work, including paper-bag makers, bidi workers, weavers, zardosi and zari workers, and chikan workers. They suffer particularly from pain in the back, shoulders and waist, and stiffness in joints. Their eyes ache and water from long hours of strain.
2. **Problems due to contact with hazardous material :** Constant contact with woodsmoke, cashew oil, gases like carbon monoxide, and chemical fumes in the electronics industry, tobacco dust, and silica dust causes innumerable health problems, debilitating and even fatal. Protective equipment is never provided.
3. **Problems related to work environment :** These include lack of light, ventilation, space, water, and latrines, which are exacerbated by the long hours of work and the fineness and minuteness required, as in embroidery and lace-making.

4. **Problems related to work actions :** Tying, stitching, banging, lifting and bending all lead to severe health problems, this is aggravated due to chemicals involved in processes like block-printing and by fertilizers and pesticides in agricultural work.
5. **Problems related to lifting weights :** Lifting heavy weights gives rise to health problems like menstrual disorders, miscarriages, prolapsed uterus, and back problems, particularly relating to the spinal column, especially in construction and brick workers. Worksites are also hazardous for the children who suffer injuries and accidents due to the non-availability of creches and schools.
6. **Problems related to long hours of work :** Most of the serious health risks are multiplied by the long hours of work and the repetitiveness of the work (like bending, stamping and lifting).
7. **Problems due to the repetitiousness of the movements :** When women do the same work over and over again, risks to their health and the subsequent problems are compounded, because the work itself is arduous and risky, and also because in many cases only some of the muscles are being used, or rather, overused. Moreover, repetitive movements reduce the mind to a drugged state which is indicative of mental fatigue and impairs clarity and alertness, leading to carelessness and, therefore, accident-proneness.
8. **Problems related to technology :** Most technological developments are aimed at maximizing profits; their introduction results in the displacement and retrenchment of women workers without offering them alternatives. On the other hand, many women-specific areas of work, where the primitiveness of the technology is a serious problem, are left entirely alone. In many cases, the use of machines has worsened the existing health hazards, and there is no accompanying investment in measures to protect workers from these effects of technological advance.
9. **Problems related to mental stress :** Women in the unorganised sector suffer from tremendous insecurity as they are subject to displacement and unemployment much more than men and have to manage their household economies on meagre income and with very few supports. Moreover, sexual exploitation is regularly experienced by almost all sections of women in the informal sector, varying from rape to wife-beating to prostitution. While men workers experience exploitation at the workplace, women workers experience both exploitation and oppression, not only at the workplace, but also in society and at home.

#### **Specific health problems related to occupation**

A tabular representation of some of the known health hazards in various occupations in which women in the informal sector are involved follows, along with concrete recommendations to deal with them.

**Table 1 : Occupational health hazards — Causes and recommendations**

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b>Manual Agricultural Workers</b> (Postural Problems; exposure to dusts and chemicals; unguarded implements; working barefoot)</p>	<p><b>General</b> Generalised body ache; aches in calves, hips, back, legs and shoulders; nasal catarrh, irritating coughs, irritation of the respiratory systems; respiratory allergies; respiratory track infections; tightness of chest; chest capacities; pneumoconiosis; cutaneous allergies; skin irritation; rashes and pruritus; mycosis; eye irritation; paddy keratitis; helminthiasis — schistosomiasis, ankylostomiasis; paronocia, fungal infections in feet, eczema; osteomyelitis of fingers.</p> <p><b>Injuries</b> High rate of thresher accidents, especially, while crushing sugarcane and ginning cotton; also serious physical injuries occur from the cutting edges of implements, such as sickles and machetes; for lack of firstaid facilities, small injuries become serious and often lead to tetanus.</p> <p><b>Toxicities</b> Pesticide poisoning, intestinal, respiratory and neurological disorders; nausea; vomiting; abdomi-</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The hours of work should be regulated through the guarantee of a living wage and security of alternative employment in certain periods.</li> <li>2. Proper implementation of laws regarding guarding of machinery.</li> <li>3. Warning and training about the use of chemicals.</li> <li>4. Provision of protective equipment.</li> <li>5. Alternative work allocation during pregnancy, and in the post-natal period.</li> <li>6. Education and dissemination of information about the possible health hazards.</li> <li>7. Research into the toxicology of the materials used.</li> <li>8. Provision of health and medical facilities.</li> </ol>

nal cramps; diarrhoea, cough; headaches; vertigo, blurred vision; muscular twitching; convulsions; loss of reflexes; loss of sphincter control; disturbance of equilibrium; jaundice, coma, and ultimately, death may result by respiratory arrest.

### Gynaec

Abortions : premature deaths and still births; high rate of neonatal, infant and maternal mortality.

### Cotton-pickers and podopeners

(lack of personal protective equipment; heavy workload due to piece-rates)

Bleeding of fingers



सत्यमेव जयते

1. Provision of personal protective equipment;

2. Payment of daily wages.

### Plantation Workers

(inhalation of dust; exhaustion due to heavy workloads, further increased by piece-rated wages and by high environmental temperatures and humidity; lack of health and medical services, working barefoot)

Lung infections and bronchial problems; physical stress; malnutrition; Helminthic infestations; dysenteries, contact dermatitis and other contact diseases; heat stroke; high incidence of maternal and child mortality.

1. Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage and regular employment.

2. Provision of personal protective equipments.

3. Provision of health and medical facilities.

4. Alternate work allocation during and after pregnancy.

5. Warning and training

**OCCUPATION AND SOME HEALTH PROBLEMS  
CAUSAL FACTORS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

about the use of chemicals.

6. Proper food supplements.

7. Education about the possible health hazards.

**Tea-pickers**

(Working with unsafe chemicals; unsafe work terrain)

Insect and snake bites; allergies; occupational and bronchial; pesticide hazards; accidents and falls due to steep slopes; pain in back due to carrying heavy loads.

1. Provision of personal protective equipment.

2. Reduction in workloads by providing a living wage on a daily or time basis.

3. Provision of medical and health facilities.

**Nomadic sheep-herders**

(Continuous walking over rough terrain; lack of medical facilities)

Pain in joints; cuts in feet; miscarriages; high rate of infant mortality. (Personal Conversations)

1. Provision of sheds.

2. Institute a scheme of trained mobile paramedics as exists for mobile teachers in Kashmir.

**Mine Workers**

(exposure to mineral dusts; extremely hazardous working conditions; lack of timely diagnosis)

Pneumoconiosis (a collective name of lung diseases caused by the continued inhalation of dust); increased respiratory ailments; cancer of the lungs; stomach, liver, kidneys and the central nervous system are affected by toxic dusts; deaths due to accidents.

1. Reduction in dust levels;

2. Immediate implementation of existing laws.

3. Proper diagnosis and treatment.

4. Workers should have the right to decide about the safety of the mine and act on it.

5. Regulation of working hours through guaranteeing a living wage.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Quartz Crushers and mine workers.</b>	Silicosis; cough and expectoration; dyspnoea, chest pain, high mortality rates among young workers.	6. Provision of comfortable personal protective equipment. 7. Nutritional supplements. 8. Provision of health and medical services.
<b>Garry-workers (Chrome)</b> (Exposure to high temperatures; lack of eye protection)	Heat strokes; severe eye problems as chips of alloys fly into the eyes.	1. Frequent rest periods; 2. Provision of sheds and rest rooms; 3. Provision of drinking water and mineral salts of personal protective equipment.
<b>Construction Workers</b> (heavy work load; unsafe noise levels; exposure to dusts and chemicals; accident-prone working conditions; contract labour)	Physical stress and strain, skeletal defects; numbness of hands and fingers; loss of hearing; stress; high blood pressure; muscular pain; intestinal problems; gastroenteritis; respiratory problems; asthma; silicosis; asbestosis; skin diseases; heat cramps and sun burns; serious accident injuries. deaths; spontaneous miscarriages; high rate of infant mortality; a feeling of isolation and rootlessness.	1. Regulation of employer-employee relations. 2. Strict provision of scaffolding. 3. Reduction in noise levels. 4. Provision of personal protective equipment. 5. Alternative work for women during and after pregnancy. 6. Guarantee of living wage. 7. Reduction in working hours.

**Employment Guarantee  
Scheme Workers**

(postural problems; unsafe implements; lack of sheds; heavy workloads; lack of health and medical services)

Backaches; abdominal pains; pains in hands, feet, knees and shoulder-joints; increase in pain in the knees with age; splitting headaches, and migraines — nausea, giddiness; vomiting; loss of appetite, leucorrhea; cramps in legs; dizziness and abortions.

1. Proper wage rates to make possible frequent rest periods.
2. Provision of sheds and drinking water.
3. Alternative work during and after pregnancy e. g. running creches at EGC work-sites.

**Brick-workers**

(lack of personal protective equipment; no precautions for work in hot atmosphere; contract and bonded labour; continuous heavy work loads, even during pregnancy)

Heat exhaustion, burn blisters and wounds on hands; constant infections of the wounds; cracking, roughening and blistering of hands; aching of feet; pain in shoulders, back and neck; coughing, chest pains; premature ageing, injuries due to accidents to the women and children, prolapse of the uterus, often resulting in hysterectomies; miscarriage, sexual exploitation.

1. Regulation of employment.
2. Frequent rest periods.
3. Provision of sheds and water and mineral salts.
4. Alternate work during and after pregnancy.
5. Personal protective equipment.
6. Provision of first aid facilities.

**Salt-kiln Workers**

(lack of personal protective equipment; working in the hot sun; unsafe working conditions)

Heat strokes; constant bleeding in the feet; injuries due to accidents.

1. Regulation of employment.
2. Personal protective equipment.
3. Provision of sheds and drinking water and mineral salts.



OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Hand-cart Pullers</b> (heavy work, even during pregnancy)	Heavy muscular exertion; thickening of the skin in the hypogastric region (lower part of abdomen); thickening of the palms; more calories spent than recovered every day; menstrual problems; repeated miscarriages.	1. Provision of better-designed hand-carts. 2. Subsidised loan facilities for investing in the improved handcart. 3. Provision of alternate work during and after pregnancy.
<b>Fuel and Fodder Gathering</b> (postural problems; long hours of walking and carrying loads)	Great physical strain and distress; postural defects, like bent backs; long hours of walking and carrying loads; pain in legs, calf muscles, shoulders and arms; thorn pricks; falls from heights; sexual harassment.	1. Provision of alternate, easily available fuel. 2. State-owned fodder farms which are easily accessible, without harassments to the women.
<b>Carrying of Water</b> (heavy physical strain, even during pregnancy)	Physical strain; intense pain in different parts of the body, especially the legs, waist, pinbones and shoulders; prolapse of the uterus; miscarriages.	1. A well-researched and properly planned scheme for the provision of clean, drinking water to every house be worked out immediately on a war-footing.
<b>Head-loaders</b> (heavy work-loads; hazardous work terrain; work during pregnancy too; sexual harassment)	Accident injuries; insect bites, thorncuts and skin burns; tetanus; eye problems; lung congestion; respiratory problems; tuberculosis; high rate of infant mortality and miscarriages; mental tension.	1. Provision of personal protective equipment. 2. Provision of alternate work during and after pregnancy. 3. Provision of medical facilities at work-sites.

**All workers involved in Manual Labour**

(lifting heavy weights; postural problems; heavy workload; continuous heavy work from childhood through illness, pregnancy and in the post-partum period to old age; nutritional deficiency)

Disturbances of blood in the pelvic organs and lowerlimbs; menstrual disorders; prolapse of the uterus; miscarriage or still birth; flat and narrow pelvic, if carrying weights from early age; risk of injury to spinal column and adjacent muscles, especially in the lumbar region; circulatory organs may be affected; deformities; callosities; neuritic pains; paralysis.



1. Provision of compulsory and free education with stipend for girls.
2. Research on ergonomics and working out good postures and training workers in these.
3. Developing of safe and efficient implements.
4. Training of doctors in Occupational Health.
5. Legislating a comprehensive act on the working conditions of workers, to include maternity benefits, leave provision, health insurance, a living wage, security of employment and old age pension.
6. Nutritional supplements programme to be introduced.
7. Availability of first aid and other health and medical services.
8. Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage and security of regular employment.
9. Easy accessibility to drinking water and fuel

fodder.

10. Education and awareness building of the women, the policy makers and the people on the issue of women's occupation-related health problems should be initiated immediately through the mass media.

### Service Sector

#### Domestic workers

(postural problems; working in water and with household chemical-based products)

Frequent colds; bruises, acid burns and other burns; chronic bodyache; postural problems; bursitis.



1. Free personal protective devices should be provided to protect domestic workers against harm from chemical based products.

2. Protection in terms of wages, employment, security, health provision, paid sick leave and old age pensions should be given to them.

3. Training facilities for alternate skills should be provided.

#### Washer-women

(working in water; continuous use of chemical-based products)

Cancer, mainly of the kidneys and genitals, also of the bladder, skin and lymph tissues, irritation of the eyes, and upper respiratory tract, acute chest pain, fatigue, drowsiness, memory impairment.

1. More research needed.

2. Substitution of unsafe chemicals by safer ones.

3. Personal protective equipment should be provided especially water-proof and hand protection and aprons.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Sweeper and Scavenger Women</b> (working in the open elements and with infectious rubbish heaps)	Nausea; burns, rashes and sores on hands and feet, insect bites, vital infections, fever, headaches, body aches, exhaustion.	4. Hexylresorcinol aerosols should be provided in order to disinfect clothes.  5. Regular medical watch for skin disorders.
<b>Rag-pickers</b> (working in the open elements and infectious rubbish piles)	Dog-bites and glass-cuts, skin disease; virus infections like flu, colds, and coughs, headache and fainting.	1. Personal protective equipment must be provided against burns, rashes, sores and fumes.  2. Alternative training facilities and alternate employment should be provided.  1. Alternative income-generation schemes and training should be provided.  2. Effective medical facilities and protective equipments to be provided.
<b>Prostitutes</b> (transmission of infections from clients; treatment by quacks)	Sexually transmitted diseases; adopic pregnancies, backstreet abortions, miscarriages, constant pain in the abdomen, uterine and vaginal infection; leucorrhea, chronic pelvic infections, impaired fertility, sterility; irregular menstruation; possibility of giving birth to deformed and visually handicapped children; tuberculosis and	1. Alternative income generation schemes must be initiated for those who would like to leave this occupation.  2. Housing schemes for prostitutes should be evolved to free them from the clutches of brothelkeepers.  3. Dé-criminalisation of prostitution, without legalisation.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	other diseases like jaundice and typhoid, skin disease like scabies; fevers; colds, coughs, asthma; anaemia; stomach ulcers; dizziness; guilt feelings; emotional deprivation, depression.	sing it should be legislated. 4. Awareness-building among the workers about the possibility of occupational diseases.
<b>Health personnel</b> (transmission of infections from patients; Government coercion)	Infections and contagious diseases, especially tuberculosis and jaundice; sexual harassment; mental tension (due to pressure for completing family planning targets from the Government)	1. Implementation of ILO Recommendations (Recommendation No. 157, Convention No. 149)  Some of these are : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o regular medical examinations</li> <li>o more research on specific risks</li> <li>o personal protective equipment</li> <li>o longer annual holidays</li> <li>o compensation</li> </ul> 2. Hours of work should be regulated.  3. Provision of safe housing.
<b>Masala-pounding workers</b> (repeated lifting of arms interchangeably while pounding; constant friction of the hand; skin irritation and irritation of mucous membranes due to the masala)	Back pain; body ache; chest pain; headache; pain in arms and legs; pain in shoulder joints; coughing, sneezing; abdominal pain; burning sensations (especially in hands) blis-	1. Regular free medical check-ups and treatment are necessary.  2. Training facilities for alternative employment should be provided.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
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ters and callouses; eye problems; burning sensation while urinating; white vaginal discharge; dizziness and exhaustion.

### Vendors

(working in the open; walking long distances; carrying weights; harassment by police and licensing authorities)

Coughs, colds, fever, eye complaints, constant headaches, pain in hands and shoulders, stiffness in hands and hips, backaches, extreme fatigue, mental tension.



1. Women vendors should be given protective devices for their hands, feet and head, including lighter load-carrying devices, like folding wheel barrows.

2. They should have the right to free movement in the country and licenses should be issued to any woman who wants to vend her wares.

3. All necessary steps must be taken to stop harassment, intimidation, extortion by police and other officials and authorities.

4. Protected vending places should be built at locations convenient to both the consumers and the vendors.

### All Women Workers in the Service Sector

(Uncovered body parts in contact with water for long periods of time; contact with dirt infected by microbes, viruses; exposure to hazardous chemicals and the elements; transmission of infections from other people, due to close

Chronic body aches; chills; cold; bursitis, cancer of kidneys and skin; respiratory problems; insect bites; infectious and contagious diseases; skin diseases; burning sensations in hands, and abdomen; eye problems;

1. Regulation of hours of work through a living wage is necessary.

2. Provision of personal protective equipment for work, where body parts in constant contact with water and where heavy loads are

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
contact; lifting of heavy weights frequently; postural problems; accidents; low nutritional status; lack of facilities like toilets, drinking water, rest rooms; low wages and insecurity of employment)	injuries to feet, hands and palms; sexual harassment and abuse; harassment by officials and the police.	<p>carried.</p> <p>3. Unsafe chemicals to be substituted.</p> <p>4. Provision of training and alternate employment.</p> <p>5. Provision of powerful local exhausts.</p> <p>6. Medical monitoring and free good medical treatment.</p> <p>7. Doctors trained in Occupational Health to be provided in comprehensive medical schemes, including maternity benefits.</p> <p>8. Strict regulation of the powers of officials; stopping police harassment of prostitutes, ragpickers and vendors.</p> <p>9. Education and awareness-building of the women workers, the policy-makers and the people, on the issue of women's occupation related health problems should be initiated immediately through the mass media.</p>



#### Home Based House-workers

(Exposure to dust, fumes, fuel smoke, chemicals in household products; pos-

Cough and expectoration; bronchitis; emphysema, irritation of eyes, nose and

1. Hours of work should be regulated.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
sibility of accidents; heavy work load; drudgery; postural problems; mental tension)	throat; skin wounds, skin reactions; eye diseases; physical pain; exhaustion; anaemia, hastening of tumour; carbon monoxide toxicity; impaired foetal development, service depression; low self-esteem.	<p>2. More research in and easy availability of safe cooking fuel e. g. LPG Cylinders.</p> <p>3. Availability of and education about better abrasive cleaners.</p> <p>4. Provision of personal protective equipments.</p> <p>5. Sharing of work by others including men in the household.</p> <p>6. Provision of community kitchens, community child-care and laundries.</p>

### Bidi-workers

(postural problems; exposure to tobacco dust and nicotine; cuts due to injury; repetitive movements, constant friction on fingers)

Neck and low back pain; pain in hands and fingers; abdominal pain; burning sensation in the throat; cough; chronic bronchitis, asthma; palpitation; bodyache; eye problems; giddiness; effect of nicotine on reproductive functions; amenorrhoea; leucorrhoea; general fatigue; anaemia.

1. Lessening of work loads through a regular fixation of wage-rates.
2. Reduction in dust levels.
3. Development of suitable implements to avoid postural problems.
4. Regular medical check-ups and treatment.

### Chikan workers

(postural problems; allergies; low nutritional levels; continuous strain on eyes and working in ill ventilated and badly lighted atmosphere)

Back-aches; spondylitis; fatigue; failing eye-sight; tuberculosis; lung function disorders; allergic effects; Vitamin-D deficiency, goitre.

1. Development of appropriate implements to avoid postural problems.
2. Regular eye check-ups and provision of free spectacles.



OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
		<p>3. Programme to provide iodised salt and Vitamin-D.</p> <p>4. Provision of a living wage.</p> <p>5. Provision of alternate employment.</p>
<p><b>Lace-workers</b> (postural problems; repetitive movements, continuous eye strain and working in ill ventilated and badly lighted rooms)</p>	Headaches, low back pain; finger aches, muscle-pain; eye problems.	<p>1. Provision of frequent rest periods.</p> <p>2. Provision of a living wage and regular employment.</p>
<p><b>Agarbatti-workers</b> (postural problems; reaction to chemicals and non-availability of personal protective equipments)</p>	Low back pain, pain in hands, palms, and fingers; contact dermatitis; skin abrasions.	<p>1. Research on and provision of substitute, safe work materials.</p> <p>2. Provision of personal protective equipments.</p> <p>3. Provision of a living wage and regular employment.</p>
<p><b>Paper-bag makers</b> (postural factors and lack of personal protective equipments for hands and fingers, repetitive uncreative work)</p>	Bodyaches; constant pain in the back, shoulders and waist, backs grow bent, stiffness in joints; hardening and cracking of skin, deep cracks along fingers, discolouring and itching of fingers; pain and watering of eyes; tuberculosis, lack of Vitamin-D; constant acidity; heart disease; dulling of the mind.	<p>1. Training in good postures.</p> <p>2. Provision of personal protective equipments for hands.</p> <p>3. Provision of regular employment or alternate employment.</p>
<p><b>Zari and Zardosi Workers</b> (postural factors; long</p>	Weakening of eye-sight,	1. Research into and devel-

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
hours of work; fine, minute work in ill-lighted rooms)	chronically hunched back; aching hands and fingers; legs ache; chronic headaches, body aches.	<p>opment of ergonomically correct tools is necessary.</p> <p>2. Postural training should be initiated through workers' education boards.</p> <p>3. Reduction in workloads through better wage-rates.</p> <p>4. Facilities like proper lighting at the workplace i.e. at home, should be provided.</p>
<b>Carpet Weavers</b> (postural problems, and badly lighted rooms)	Backaches; eye problems	<p>1. Facilities like proper lighting and postural training. Also development of ergonomically correct tools.</p> <p>2. Reduction in workloads through the guarantee of a living wage.</p>
<b>Papad-workers</b> (excessive workloads; postural problems; lack of facilities at home)	Pain in the chest, shoulders, legs and hands (personal communication)	<p>1. Reduction in workloads can be achieved through an increase in wage-rates, as well as regulation of hours of work.</p> <p>2. Periodic rest intervals during work.</p>
<b>Block Printers</b> (repetitive movement of stamping the block; constant contact with the chemical dye; postural aspects)	Tuberculosis; chest pain; difficulty in breathing; roughening of fingers; hardening of palms; aching and numbing of fingers; hurting of hands; skin irritation and itching;	<p>1. Workloads should be reduced through guaranteeing a living wage.</p> <p>2. Personal protective equipment should be provided.</p>

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
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giddiness; miscarriages  
(personal conversations)

3. Alternate employment should be provided.

4. Pregnant women should be given paid leave or provided with alternate employment.

### Tagai-workers

(postural problems; minute stitching work; low nutritional level)

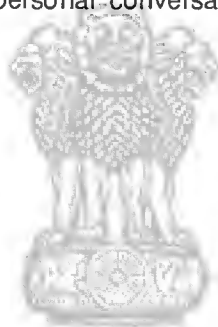
Aching of feet and low back pain; eye pains and weakening eye-sight; extreme fatigue and weakness.  
(personal conversations)

1. Regular and free medical check-up, especially eye check-ups should be undertaken, spectacles should be provided free.

2. Facilities like proper lighting should be provided.

3. Workloads should be reduced by providing the women with living wages.

4. Women workers should be provided with postural training.



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### Gunny-bag Stitching Workers

(Constant exposure to and inhalation of cement dust; postural problems; low nutritional level)

Weakening eye-sight, headaches; backaches; feet aches, fever, asthma; breathing problems; intermittent, shallow cough; tuberculosis; loss of appetite, extreme fatigue  
(personal conversations)

1. Powerful local exhausts.

2. Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory problems.

3. Provision of nutritional supplements.

4. Provision of training and alternate employment.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Chindi-workers</b> (exposure to dust, heavy workload; low nutritional status)	Chronic cough; hurting and watering of eyes; headaches, giddiness; blanking out, severe pain in the lower abdomen; scanty periods with clots and other menstrual irregularities, exhaustion (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Powerfull local exhausts.</li> <li>2. Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory and gynaecological problems.</li> <li>3. Provision of nutritional supplements.</li> </ol>
<b>Tie-and-Dye Workers</b> (postural problems, cuts due to the metal contraption used; excessive work load)	Constant cuts and dents in fingers; paining of the fingers and arms; eye pain, back aches, especially low back pain, severe pains in the abdomen (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research on and development of tools and imple-ments which are ergonomi-cally more scientific.</li> <li>2. Postural training should be given to the workers.</li> <li>3. Personal protective equipment should be pro-vided especially for the fin-gers.</li> <li>4. Hours of work should be reduced through guaranteeing a living wage and security of employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Shoe-embroidery work-ers</b> (postural problems; min-ute eye-straining work)	Back-pain especially low back pain; eye problem; extreme fatigue (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Postural training should be given to the workers.</li> <li>2. Facilities like proper lighting of homes.</li> <li>3. Hours of work should be reduced, through guaran-teeing a living wage and</li> </ol>

**OCCUPATION AND SOME HEALTH PROBLEMS  
CAUSAL FACTORS**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

security of employment.

4. Provision of personal protective equipment for palms and fingers.

**Bead-piercing Workers  
and Bangle Workers**

(postural problems; minute work)

Back pain; weakening of eyesight. (Personal communication)

1. Research and development of ergonomically better tools and implements.

2. Postural training should be given to workers.

3. Facilities like proper lighting should be provided in their homes at subsidised rates.

4. Regular medical check-ups and treatment.

5. Provision of training and alternative employment.



**Charkha-spinners**

(Constant use of shoulders, arm and fingers for pulling the thread, postural problems)

Aches in shoulders and upper right arm; back aches, finger aches; respiratory problems (Personal communication).

1. Levels of cotton dust, and fibres in the atmosphere need to be monitored and controlled.

2. Workloads should be reduced through a guarantee of a living wage, security of employment and facilities at the work-site i.e. at home.

**Tailoring Workers**

(postural problems, heavy work on the machines)

Low back pain; leg pains; eye problems (Personal conversations)

1. Regular eye check-ups and development of suitable height of machines, to suit

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Ready-made Garments Workers</b> (postural problems; heavy workload)	Postural problems—back, especially low back pain, eye problems; anaemia; leucorrhea; urinary tract infections	women's height.  1. Necessity of reduction in workloads through guaranteeing a living wage.  2. Proper facilities like lighting, ventilation should be provided.  3. Research and development of machines to suit the height of women.
<b>Brass-ware Workers</b> (Hot atmosphere, accident prone work)	Respiratory disease; eye problems; heat exhaustion; accidents.	1. Regulating work on the guidelines given in the encyclopaedia by the ILO for hot work.  2. Regular Check-ups and treatment for respiratory problems.
<b>Basket-weavers</b> (handling rough sharp edge surfaces)	Bleeding of hands; pain in lower back.	1. Provision of personal protective equipment.  2. Provision of a living wage as well as alternate employment.
<b>Pottery-painters</b> (exposure to lead)	Lead poisoning	1. It is necessary to control exposure to lead and to substitute the presently used unsafe chemicals by safe ones.
<b>Supari-cutters</b> (postural problems)	Aching of hands and	1. Research on and devel-

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	shoulders	<p>opment of alternate proper instruments.</p> <p>2. Reduction in workloads through guaranteeing a living wage.</p>
<b>Workers Ironing Clothes</b> (Excessive workloads)	Pains in hands and shoulders (Personal communication)	<p>1. It is necessary to reduce the workloads through guaranteeing a living wage.</p> <p>2. It is necessary to monitor workplaces for levels of allergens and control of allergens at workplaces.</p>
<b>Knitting Workers</b> (Exposure to allergens)	Asthma	<p>1. It is necessary to monitor work places for levels of allergens and control of allergens at workplaces.</p>
<b>Road Workers</b> (handling rough sharp edged material)	Cutting and bleeding of palms and fingers, back aches.	<p>1. Personal protective equipment should be provided to the workers.</p> <p>2. First-aid facilities should be provided at the worksites.</p>
<b>All Women Workers Working in Home-based Occupations</b> (Exposure to dusts, such as tobacco, cement, house-dust, exposure to hazardous chemicals, carbon monoxide, lead, abrasive cleaners, fungi)	Respiratory problems; hastening of tumours; digestive problems; adverse effect on reproductive systems; fatigue; skin problems; back, particularly low back pain; pain	<p>1. Research on and development of hazard free cooking facilities like smokeless chullas, bio-gas or LPG gas stoves. These should be widely distributed.</p>

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
ments of a few parts of the body; heavy workload; postural problems without respite, constant strain on eyes due to poor lighting; low nutritional status and work valued less in money terms as well as in terms of status.	in limbs; body aches; stiffness of joints; weakening of eye sight; heart diseases; acidity, ulcers; exhaustion and dizziness.	<p>2. Regulation of working hours of the workers through</p> <p>a. Guaranteeing a living wage.</p> <p>b. Security of employment.</p> <p>c. leave and holiday provisions.</p> <p>3. The workers should be further protected by means of legislation and ensuring that they receive:</p> <p>a. maternity benefits and ante-natal care.</p> <p>b. creche and anganwadi facilities.</p> <p>c. basic facilities like drinking water, electricity, toilets.</p> <p>d. old age pensions.</p> <p>4. Workers should be provided with work space near the home and credit facilities for production shelters. Housing norms should provide for work-space needs.</p> <p>5. Personal protective equipment should be provided to the workers.</p> <p>6. Postural training and other preventive health education should be initiated through the Workers Education Board.</p> <p>7. Research on ergonomic</p>





aspect of homebased production should be initiated immediately through National Research and Design Institutes, with a view to suggesting possible modifications in the work posture and process and to develop simple, inexpensive preventive and protective equipments. This should be done in consultation with workers.

8. Women workers should be provided with nutritious food supplements.

9. Education and raising of awareness of the women workers, the policy-makers and the people, should be undertaken through the mass media. This should include

- a. the sort of work women do;
- b. the health related and specific health problems they face.
- c. the reasons for these problems.
- d. the various possible solutions to reduce and stop these.



### Processing Workers Fish-processing

(Working in ice-water, heavy seasonal work; fluctuations in work quantum, injuries due to handling fish)

Extreme fatigue, back-ache, leg pain; chest congestion, peeling of skin, skin infections; numbing of fingers, scratching, blistering and

1. It is necessary to provide the workers with the necessary personal protective equipment.

2. The workers should be

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	bleeding of hands; burning and stinging pains in hands.	able to take frequent rest periods during work.  3. Guarantee of a living wage, continuous employment and facilities at work-site.
<b>Cashew Workers</b> (constant contact with corrosive, black fluid, hard nut splitting; postural problems)	Burning and corroding of hands; allergy; dermatitis; hand-injuries; boils and abscesses on hands; severe respiratory problems; back pain due to crouching position.	1. It is necessary to provide the workers with the necessary personal protective equipment.  2. Timely treatment of skin problems.  3. Guarantee of a living wage, regular employment and facilities at work site.
<b>Coir-workers</b> (sitting on wet ground; unprotected hands; exposure to coir dust; lack of early detection of elephantiasis)	Respiratory and cardiovascular complaints; asthma; cough; expectoration; dysnoea; precordial pain; palpitation; haemoptysis; skin diseases; elephantiasis; leprosy; hyperkeratosis; neurological disorders.	1. Local exhausts should be provided. 2. Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory problems, and diseases like elephantiasis are necessary.  3. Workloads should be reduced through a living wage, security of employment and facilities at work site.
<b>Coir-yarn Spinners</b> (handling rough surfaces)	Hand injuries — linear abrasions of the skin of the palm; pain and bleeding of injuries (Personal commu-	1. Personal protective equipment especially for hands and palms should be provided.

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	nication)	2. Living wages, regular employment, medical facilities and old age pensions.
<b>Wool Workers</b> (exposure to dust and fibres)	Respiratory allergies like allergic rhinitis and allergic bronchitis; pulmonary tuberculosis.	1. Personal protective equipment should be provided. 2. Regular medical check-ups and treatment for respiratory problems should be provided. 3. Living wages and security of employment.
<b>Glass Workers</b> (extremely hot atmosphere; cuts due to glass splinters)	Extreme thermal stress; cuts and burn injuries sometimes requiring stitches.	1. Workers should be provided with clean drinking water and mineral salts. 2. Frequent rest periods and personal protective equipment should be provided.
<b>Pottery Workers</b> (continuous exposure to silica dust)	Fibrosis of lungs; silicosis; tuberculosis.	1. Regulation of hours of work through a living wage and regular employment. 2. Powerful local exhausts should be provided. 3. There should be monitoring of the workplace for the extent of dust present and the size of dust particles. 4. Regular medical check-ups and treatment for lung

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
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problems should be provided.

### Garment Workers

(postural problems, eye-straining work; repetitive movements; lack of facilities, like toilets)

Pain in arms and legs; back pain, especially low back pain; swelling in limbs; pain in the neck and abdomen; persistent muscular pain; headaches; fever; eye problems; eye strain; visual fatigue; dizziness; exhaustion; insomnia, finger injuries; leucorrhea; burning and itching sensation while urinating.

1. Provision of the necessary facilities at the work place—toilets, drinking water, medical check-ups, holidays, regulation of work hours, should be made compulsory.

2. Regular eye check-ups and providing free spectacles.

3. Proper lighting and ventilation.

4. Development of appropriate instruments to avoid postural problems.

5. Living wages and regular employment.



### Electronics Workers

(handling small, numerous parts; exposure to hazardous chemicals; drudgery, postural problems)

Eye problems; tuberculosis; pneumonia; stomach problems like ulcers; fatigue; loss of appetite; skin disease; frequent sore throats; cold, backaches; insomnia; depression; anxiety.

1. Rotation of work, proper lighting, regular medical check-ups, especially eye check-ups, should be provided.

2. Security of employment and living wage.

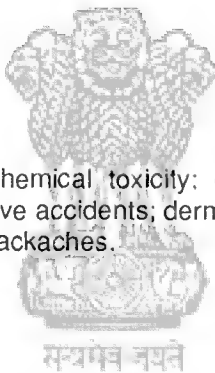
### Slate-pencil Workers

(Exposure to fine silica dust)

Dry cough; cough with expectoration; breathlessness; haemoptysis, chest pain, weight loss, fibrosis

1. Powerful local exhaust should be provided.

2. Regular medical check-

OCCUPATION AND SOME CAUSAL FACTORS	HEALTH PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	of lungs, irritation of bronchial mucosa, silicosis, clubbing of fingers; diminished chest movements, crepitations; rhonchi; early deaths.	<p>ups and treatment for respiratory problems should be provided.</p> <p>3. Training for and employment in alternative jobs should be initiated.</p> <p>4. Schemes for young children should be initiated whereby substantial stipends be made available to them.</p> <p>5. Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage.</p>
<b>Matches and Fireworks Workers</b>	 <p>Chemical toxicity; explosive accidents; dermatitis; backaches.</p>	<p>1. It is necessary to monitor the work sites to avoid explosions.</p> <p>2. Regular monitoring for levies of chemicals should be provided.</p> <p>3. Safer chemicals should be substituted instead of the present unsafe ones.</p> <p>4. Children should be given a substantial stipend to continue education and vocational training.</p>
<b>Workers in Bidi Tobacco Processing</b> (exposure to nicotine and tobacco dust)	<p>Nausea; giddiness; vomiting, headache, tiredness; loss of appetite; weaknesses.</p>	<p>1. It is necessary to monitor the levels of tobacco dust and use powerful exhausts to get rid of these.</p>

**Small-scale Pharmaceutical Workers**

(heavy workload; exposure to chemicals; postural problems)

Extreme fatigue, weakness, backaches; aching of arms, feet and shoulders; eyestrain; low resistance to the effects of the chemicals they handle.

2. The workers should be provided with personal protective equipment.

3. A living wage and regular employment are necessary.

4. For workers who are allergic to the fumes, alternate employment should be provided.

**Workers involved in Processing and other Industries**

(body exposed to ice-cold water; corrosive fluids, wet grounds; constant exposure to dusts, such as, silica, fibres, allergens; infections due to work; repetitive, monotonous work; drudgery; eye strain; injuries due to sharp-edged, rough surfaces,

Extreme fatigue, pain in body, corrosion of hands and feet; peeling of the skin; silicosis and other incurable and fatal respiratory problems such as fibrosis; clubbing of fingers, serious elephantiasis, backaches; allergies; weakening of eyesight.

1. Workloads need to be reduced.

2. Work-systems like rotation of jobs, need to be worked out to avoid eye strain.

3. Postural training needs to be initiated.

4. Levels of chemicals in the air need to be controlled.

1. Protective equipment should be provided to workers to protect them from hazardous chemicals, constant exposure to water and dust.

2. Dust and fibre levels at the work place should be mentioned.

postural problems; contact with extremely hazardous and explosive chemicals; lack of facilities like toilets, drinking water, rest rooms, low wages and insecurity of employment; low nutritional status.

3. Strict supervision to prevent accidents is necessary.

4. Workers should be given frequent rest periods. This should be made legally obligatory.

5. Proper facilities at the work-sites should be made obligatory e.g. proper lighting.

6. A medical scheme should be evolved for workers which includes, among other things, regular medical check-ups and treatment, training of especially women doctors in Occupational Health issues, maternity benefits, regular rest periods, leave and holidays.

7. Regulation of hours of work through a living wage, employment security and old age pensions.

8. Women workers should be provided with nutritious food-supplements.

9. Education and raising of awareness of the women workers, the policy-makers and the people, should be undertaken, through the mass media. This should include :



- a. the type of work women do,
- b. the health-related and specific health problems they face,
- c. the reasons or causes for these problems,
- d. the various possible solutions to reduce and stop these.

1. These are some of the known health hazards; considerable research is imperative for finding out more about these occupations and about others which have not been researched at all.
2. Almost every woman in the informal sector performs a multiplicity of roles and activities, thus the hazards they face are, in turn, multiple.
3. Most women in the informal sector also face a number of health problems as a result of their poverty and hard labour, such as malnutrition and anaemia, which are compounded by the discrimination against women that is deep-rooted in our society.

Ill health and physical and mental breakdown among women is a result of the life of hard work and worry that each woman leads. While the schemes and measures for bringing about improvements are outlined in the chapter on Recommendations, some strategies for their implementation are mentioned below :

- o Occupations which are potentially 'formalisable' by the nature of their work, like most occupations in the manual sector, should be so formalised in the form of Women Workers' Boards, which would take up the responsibility, financially and structurally, to ensure that the facilities recommended are provided.



- o Skill training and training for skill upgradation must be organised, the first for women who lack any skills or who wish to change their occupations and the second for those trapped in 'unskilled' low-paid jobs.
- o Some of the existing legislation is full of loop-holes and these need to be reviewed. For example, the Factories Act, 1984, covers a very small section of the work-force while those who are within the purview of the Act find it difficult to benefit from it for a number of reasons.
- o The fact that some protective legislation does exist, but is not enforced points to the great need for effective strategies for implementation. One possibility is that trade unions and women's organisations may be given the authority to supervise the implementing of legislation.



## 6. COMMUNICATION NETWORK SYSTEM

### Women and communication

Throughout history different channels of communication have been powerful instruments for transmitting values, moulding beliefs and attitudes, and changing lifestyles. In this context a truly democratic set-up presupposes two things: first, that the information generated is freely available to all, and, second, that the flow of information is not merely from the top to the bottom, but also the other way round. Without this free, two way exchange of information, communication media cannot be effective agents of change.

In India, control of communication media has been vested in men, therefore (a) women have traditionally had a very marginal role in the process of communication, (b) images of women, projected as they were by men and for men, were based on male perceptions and men's desire to retain women in the background to serve the needs of men and play a secondary role, and (c) communication media are not designed to meet women's needs, nor to be used by them.

Although in this century there have been tremendous developments in this field, biases against women still prevail, particularly in the portrayal of women in media, in spite of women having entered this field in large numbers. The poorer sections, particularly, do not have access to communication channels and are by large ignored by it. Many are still dependent for information on religious heads and local leaders who have a vested interest in rigidly editing and even distorting the contents of communication. The realities of their lives are not revealed in the media and they remain invisible and unrecognised.

### Policy

The Indian Government has yet to come up with a well-formulated national communications policy. The Seventh Plan document claims that "The major thrust of the plan relating to mass media will be to raise the level of people's consciousness and enrich their cultural and social life and make them better-informed citizens. It will assist in stepping up the pace of development of programmes and sensitise the people towards national and international events of importance." However, the plan does not clearly spell out how this can be achieved and no policy announcement has yet been made although, on May 24, 1987, it was announced that a long-term national media policy had been finalized by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

In this policy void, public and private sector media continue to be governed by commercial norms, as revealed by the discussion of the different communication media that follows.

## **The Print Media**

The role of the print media as the watchdog of social consciousness has been reiterated time and again.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Given the low literacy rates in India the outreach of the Indian Press is necessarily low but its significance in formulating public opinion cannot be denied. An important change in the last 10-15 years is the greater visibility of women's issues, notwithstanding the survival of the old stereotypes and sexist imagery. However there is a glaring absence of coverage of women in the unorganized sector; these women only make the news if they are raped or molested by people in power. The exploitation and silent desperation in their lives are rarely treated as newsworthy. Issues taken up by the English press are those considered relevant for the urban reading public. When women's problems are discussed the focus is on urban middle-class women. Advertising helps enormously in buttressing middle-class norms, maintaining the status quo and increasing the invisibility of women in the unorganised sector, with its bias towards glamour, glossiness and commercialisation.

## **The radio**

In a country like India, with its oral tradition and mass illiteracy, audio-visual media have a deep impact. Radio programmes are broadcast from 170 transmitters of which 131 are medium wave, covering 90.3 per cent of the population and spread over 79.81 per cent of the country's area. T V, on the other hand, has an estimated outreach of only 70 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup>

Evaluations of radio programmes reveal that, by and large, issues relating to women are slotted for the special women's hour, popularly known as 'Purdah Hour'. This implies that the messages of equality, need for changing social customs and values, and issues of relevance in women's lives concern only women: men do not need to know or to change. There is a tendency to talk down to women and to limit programmes literally to household interests and it is presumed that this is all they are interested in and also that men are not interested. The introduction of sponsored programmes set in the women's programmes has trivialised the entire purpose of consciousness-raising, and the skits and plays reinforce negative stereotypes of women, emphasizing family-centred roles. Health programmes concentrate on family planning and there are no links between radio programmes and extension work by development functionaries.

The reach of the radio to women group is only 44 per cent due to the exclusive appropriation of the set by the men in the family. For example, during peak farming seasons the men frequently carry the set with them to the fields. Moreover, the radio is mostly used for listening to film songs. During the Commission's tours it became clear that less than half of the poor women had not heard any programmes on developmental issues and those who had were sceptical about the information given in these programmes. Most women workers work almost 12 to 14 hours a day

and do not get the time to listen to the radio, even if they had access, especially since the timings of the programmes are not coordinated with their needs. A crucial problem is that the language used is often too difficult and people cannot understand what is being said.

An analysis of radio advertisements indicates that (a) the dominant image of a woman is of a housewife and mother washing clothes with various brands of soaps, each better than the other, (b) they depict an ostentatious lifestyle and generate an expanding desire for luxury items -- they foster consumerism, (c) the spots and sponsored programmes broadcast on rural programmes and women's programmes are extensions of consumerist viewpoints "and could, over a period of time, build up unfulfilled aspirations and false needs." (Verghese Commission, 1978), and, (d) women in the target group are rarely addressed because they lack purchasing power.

## Television

Though, initially, T V transmission was confined to a few big cities and for a very limited time, today T V begins with breakfast and, on weekends, transmits for practically the whole day. Programmes could be divided into four categories:

1. The Hindi feature film and film-based programmes like Chhaya Geet categorised by Doordarshan as "Super A" with a viewership of more than 70 per cent.
2. Various plays, news telecasts, sports events and sponsored programmes classified as "A" with a viewership of between 50 and 70 per cent.
3. English serials, youth programmes, and others, classified as "B" with a viewership of 30 to 50 per cent.
4. Rural programmes like 'Amchi Manse' and programmes for industrial workers, classified "C" with a viewership below 30 per cent.

The findings of the various studies and the observations made by the Joshi Committee on software for Doordarshan (1985) confirm the invisibility of poor women.<sup>5,6,7</sup> The struggle that women are waging for economic and political autonomy, legal rights, and identity is almost completely ignored, while upper class lifestyles are glamorised and consumerism is encouraged, especially through advertisements. The indifference to poor and rural women as subjects extends to women viewers. There is a complete indifference to the problems in this sector and agricultural cycles, seasonal variations, and daily patterns of work are rarely considered while scheduling programmes.

Access to T V is not as easy as is often assumed. Especially in rural areas most women never watch T V programmes and those who did watch habitually

lacked message retention and usually only watched the entertainment programmes. Only the men watch the news. Unless the quality of programmes is improved and community TV viewing facilities are provided the objective of reaching out to the majority of women with developmental messages will never be fulfilled. The potential of TV for effecting social change is at present totally unutilized; in fact the programmes and advertisements merely support and encourage the status quo.

## Cinema

Despite the popularity of the small screen and the video, cinema remains the cheapest and most sought after mode of entertainment for the vast majority of Indians.<sup>8</sup> Big money being the base of this industry there are no governing ethics whereby producers and financiers are motivated to impart messages for healthy socio-economic development. The prime concerns of commercial cinema are profit and entertainment, promoting the reinforcing traditional values and gender stereotypes.

In recent years a few films have depicted a woman's profession as an ordinary part of her life but as a rule women in Hindi films, no matter which section of society they belong to, work only when their families have fallen on evil days; thus though she may be a capable breadwinner the woman is shown as conscious of her aberrant status. The hostility towards the employed woman may be masked as pity as long as her earning is perceived as a mere extension of her role as a provider of services to the family. Nondomestic work is depicted as 'unfeminine' and in competition with men. Hindi films not only foster an abhorrence amongst working women for the work they do but also create a yearning for acquisition of middle class values rather than inspiring them to fight oppression and strive for better conditions. The only problem at work for women that Hindi film takes definite cognizance of is sexual harassment. The climax is marriage, when all these problems end and women stay home tending to housemaking. For poor women this rarely happens; the reality is a lifetime of struggle for survival.

Poverty is thus depicted as a mishap that is quite easily overcome in miraculous ways; thus the protagonist family may start poor but has little or nothing to do with other poor people in any continuing way. In this context, poverty is depicted as a moral rather than a material condition: the poverty phase establishes one's credentials as somehow morally superior to the villain in particular and to other upper class people in general. If not in the protagonist role, poor women and their families most frequently appear on the screen in roles where they directly service the middle class, but whose dehumanizing working conditions are not brought into focus. A case in point is the favourite 'maidservant' whose presence establishes the male protagonist's status, or who provides comic relief, or who graduates to being a wife, which is completely in accordance with her answering loyalty and self-abnegating service. Even new wave films have not made any remarkable breakthrough in exploration of human complexity.

## Education

Unlike in the Communications policy, the Education policy has explicitly declared that "education would be used as a strategy for achieving a basic change in the status of women." The national education system would

1. play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women.
2. contribute towards development of new values through redesigned curricula and text books (National policy on Education 1986, p. 106).<sup>9</sup> The policy further states that every educational institution should, by 1995, take up active programmes of women's development built around a study and awareness of the women's predicament, and for promotion of communication and organization among women.<sup>10</sup>

Given that textbooks can, through the use of characters and symbols, in certain situations, become a powerful medium for the perpetuation of stereotypes and role models, and conversely, can also encourage alternatives, it is disappointing to find that the former situation predominates. After scanning textbooks of seven subjects and going through about 1200 pages, there were only six references to poor women, and they are anything but sympathetic.<sup>11</sup> Rather it is suggested that the utility of female labour stems from their being cheaply available.

The picture emerging in the non-formal system appears to be no better.<sup>12</sup> A study of the adult education materials reveals that no effort has so far been made in generating 'awareness and focussing the attention of the learners to a self-perception' whereby they could deliberately attempt to become decision-makers. Collectivity, as a good starter for making these women conscious of themselves and for their empowerment, has not been considered. While most of the material is quite rich in giving health and nutrition information only tangential reference is made to women's work. Some exceptions do exist, however, such as Tamilnadu, which won an international award for its effort towards education of adult women, and the language primers from the South and the North-East which do mention sectors of self-employment such as sericulture, tea plantation, and handlooms.

## Role of Government functionaries in information dissemination

One of the lynch pins in the entire communication process is the dissemination of information of the various Government schemes by Government functionaries.<sup>13,14</sup> During the Commission's tours it was observed that most women were ignorant about the development schemes meant for them and, quite often, so were the local level government officials, particularly regarding the details and specific directives, such as that 30 per cent of IRDP beneficiaries must be women. The success and failure of development plans and programmes depends upon access to development communication, the type of channels utilized to provide access to such information, back-up services provided to concretise information and awareness into actual development gains and an upward movement of grassroot-level

feedback into policy and the programme formulation process.

It is now realised that a Development Information Discrimination System (DIDS), suited to the socio-cultural conditions of the target group, is a critical requirement. So far, however, the DIDS has played a negligible role. The report of the Parliamentary Committee to probe into the communication gap found that the bulk of the publicity budgets for anti-poverty programmes, for instance, was spent on printed literature, ignoring the fact of widespread illiteracy in the country. Another cause of ineffective outreach is the non-recognition of the stratified, heterogeneous, rural social structure and, among the functionaries, gender bias is far from absent.

At present most development communication is taking place in family zones, or at best, extended neighbourhood zones. Functionaries like the Village Pradhan or Extension Workers can only be effective if they are sensitive and are committed to reach to this sector. Communication can also be facilitated by the creation of new structures as was done in Rajasthan. Sathins are important opinion-makers and have developed credibility and self-confidence, though the BDO and Panchayat members tend to be suspicious and envious of the Pracheta, as she ranks close to them in power. A crucial point is that while men are the main communication links for women and these men remain insensitive, women are not likely to receive even all the information that the men have.

### **Self-employed women and alternative structures**

Given the indifference of mainstream communication channels and the education systems (formal and informal) to the realities in working women's lives, especially those belonging to the unorganised sector, and the prevalent lack of the commitment to increasing awareness, efforts are being made to create alternate structures in the media and in organizations. Recently, mainstream journals like the Economic and Political Weekly, and Seminar, have displayed some shift of focus but the need for exclusively women's journals cannot be gainsaid. Thus Manushi makes a significant contribution, as do Ansuya and Baija (which are regional-language journals).

Problems faced by grassroots organisation attempting to formulate alternate media are several.<sup>15,16,17</sup> A major constraint is that they are few in number and are able to cover very small areas. In the context of widespread illiteracy the relatively cheap medium of print has to be substituted with audio-visuals, which is the cause of severe constraints of finance and expertise. Moreover, even the best of intentions to generate an atmosphere of equality cannot easily overcome the centuries of social distance perpetrated by caste, class, community, and gender differences: a Brahmin woman communicator has wider access than a Harijan, and age and marital status also affect effectiveness.

Thus the media that are most likely to be effective are informal networks and

oral channels; also, although TV and films are considered luxuries the fact of their great impact requires that special attention be paid to developing effective programmes and in ensuring that the current negative trends are decisively reversed. Many groups, such as ASTHA, CENDIT, CHETNA and SEWA are using video very effectively while others are using traditional forms<sup>18</sup> such as street plays, 'Bhawai' and 'Jatra' (in theatre) and folk music; the teaching manual in Hindi developed by Deepayatan in Patna (Bihar) highlighted the art forms traditionally used by Bihari women; in Tamil Nadu 'Kummi' (a folk dance) is used to convey messages on child-care, nutrition, family welfare, health, and sanitation. Such innovations need to be further explored and used for maximum effectiveness.





## 7. ON ORGANISING

Today we are witnessing the gradual rise of a movement of self-employed women, who are organising on issues, asserting themselves, articulating their needs, and coming to the forefront of our political consciousness. As their organisations grow and spread, as they become more articulate, as they link with each other to highlight common issues, so the movement snowballs and emerges into consciousness.

Such development has been possible only because of many earlier movements and attempts to organise by these women. What little documentation is available indicates that poor women did indeed play an important role in earlier movements through participation within a larger movement, such as the Nationalist Movement and the Labour Movement, or through localised struggles over specific issues.

The Nationalist Movement started to become a mass movement with the advent of Gandhi in 1915. Khadi was perhaps the first issue which concerned the needs of poor women directly. They were also very active in the anti-alcohol campaign. However, once India became independent there was no longer any need for agitation and civil disobedience. The labour movement had been gathering momentum with increasing industrialization and by the 1920s was widespread. The struggles of the jute workers in Bengal, textile workers in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Coimbatore, plantation workers in the North-East and coir workers in Travancore, all involved the active participation of women workers. As the trade union movement grew stronger, unorganised workers, particularly women, gained little, if anything at all, and once again, their usefulness was in the past. Thus those very working women whose militancy had made a success of the labour movement, ended up being excluded from the movement.

After about 1975 with the rise of the women's movement, the labour movement slowly began to organise these women and address the major issues in their lives. The first stirrings of the movement for reform of women's status, represented by the efforts of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Muslim reform movement, and others, had an impact on only the urban middle class, being "elitist in character and limited in approach."<sup>1</sup> Women's organisation such as the All India Women's Conference, Mahila Samitis, Mahila Mandals and Mahila Samajams, lost their militancy after Independence and the participation of poor women declined.

In 1974, the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, was released. It gave prominence to the position of unorganised workers and to the status of poor women with regard to education, politics and the law. This was followed by the International Women's Year in 1975, leading to a sudden growth and a new turn in the women's movement in India. Groups with a distinctly feminist

perspective were formed and feminist theories and ideas were developed. The new groups included urban middle class groups such as the Forum Against Rape (Bombay) and the Progressive Organisation of Women (Hyderabad) as well as self-employed women's groups such as SEWA and WWF.

As the women's movement has grown, so has the realisation that a genuine movement must project and concentrate on issues that involve the masses of women. Consequently, after the 1970s, women's role in general struggles began to be not only noticed but also encouraged, such as in the fisherpeople's struggle in Kerala<sup>2</sup>, peasant struggles in Maharashtra<sup>3</sup> and the mine workers struggles, through the CMSS (Chhatisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh) in Madhya Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> After 1979 the major trade unions began to realise the importance of organising poor women and federations such as CITU, HMS, INTUC, AITUC and EMS formed women's wings.

Apart from participating in such general movements, poor women have also come together on localised specific issues which particularly affected them, like the destructively easy availability of liquor, or threats to their employment and livelihood: in 1939, the poor women rice traders in Manipur succeeded in banning export of rice to other states by large Marwari traders; in 1973, working women and housewives in Maharashtra, especially in Bombay, were organised under the Anti-Price-Rise Front led by women from several left parties to protest against inflation; 1974 saw the climax of the Chipko movement in U.P., probably the world's most well-known grassroots eco-development movement.

These localised, issue-based movements have revealed that poor women have the ability to mobilize and organise for change: they understand the issues that affect them and, under the right circumstances, can unite in a militant way to change them.

However, when the organising is for a particular issue only and at a particular place only, then the strength of the movement ultimately dies away and the movement does not give rise to an ongoing organisation which would take up one issue after another and which would gradually include many different occupations and issues within its fold.

Growth and sustained development of issue-based organisations are typically achieved by those that have traditionally developed to accommodate the economic needs of self-employed women. In Assam, for example, women have traditionally organised for collective self-help around economic issues, such as the paddy banks formed by women of the tribal villages in the plains.

Left parties, especially the marxists, have been involved in organising the masses of rural poor women at all levels. In fact, it was often the militancy of the leftists which led to an involvement of the poor with other movements. The first women's organisation amongst the left parties -- the National Federation of Indian Women -- was formed in 1954 by the CPI. Their emphasis is on literacy but they have

been active in mobilising women's protest against all types of injustice and social evils. It has been largely inactive for years although it remains the mass front of the CPI.

Regionally based Communist/Marxist organisations such as the Lal Nishan Party of Maharashtra also concentrated on class organising, which has brought significant change in the attitudes and orientation of many Communists in the last few years. This may be attributed to the role of rural women in rural upsurge, as may be the rise of non-left led women's organisations.<sup>5</sup> Since 1969, this rural upsurge has taken three main forms:

- (i) Armed struggle, mostly under Naxalite leadership among indebted poor tribal peasants in border regions of West Bengal (1968-69), Bihar (1968-69), and Andhra Pradesh (1978-79) and parts of Kerala.
- (ii) Intensive, mass, union-type organising of agricultural labourers over demands for wages, and sometimes land, has occurred in localised plains areas, most often involving the low-caste labourers of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, the Thanjanur district of Tamil Nadu, and the Ahmednagar and Dhulia districts of Maharashtra. This is the type of organising that has most consistently brought women's issues forward. The leadership has come primarily from the established parliamentary parties, as well as, more recently, from non-parliamentary groups such as the independent Marxists, communists and radicalized tribal leaders.
- (iii) Extensive mass campaigns on particular issues, including the nation-wide CPI-led "Land grab" campaign of 1970, a massive campaigning by the CPI (M) in West Bengal between 1968 and 1970 to seize illegally held land of landowners and the widespread farmers' agitation in Maharashtra from 1970 to 1973 led by the Lal Nishan Party.

### **Organisations of self-employed women**

The 1970s witnessed a new phenomenon in the history of organising -- the rise of organisations of self-employed women themselves. Unlike the localised, single-issue movements, these organisations dealt with the multitude of problems that surrounded the working and living conditions of the women. Another characteristic of these organisations was that they brought into focus the woman as a complete social being, taking into account not only her economic relations but also her social and political being. They did not concentrate only on one set of working women but continuously expanded to encompass the mass of self-employed women from different occupations within their fold.

As these organisations grew they began to see that the issues they were attacking were national in scale; this led them to expand nationally and to network with similar organisations across the country.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union of over 40,000 poor women workers in Gujarat. It was established in 1972 when a group of head-loaders, used-garment dealers, junksmiths, and vegetable vendors came together to form a workers' association. SEWA struggles for higher wages, improved working conditions, social security benefits, ownership of assets such as land, and against harassment by the police and exploitation by middlemen. However, SEWA feels that for weak and vulnerable groups like the self-employed women struggle alone is not sufficient to address the structural constraints within the trades, so the organisation also works on developmental activities by promoting the development of cooperatives of self-employed women. The concept of SEWA has spread to other areas and today there are SEWA organisations, each independent and autonomous, in Delhi, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Bhagalpur, Jamshedpur, Mithila, Monghyr, Ambala and Imphal, which are affiliated to SEWA.<sup>6</sup>

The Working Women's Forum (WWF) was formed in 1978 by the initiative of an ex-political activist, Jaya Arunachalam, with the explicit objective of empowering poor women in both their productive and their reproductive roles. The broad objectives were to create an association of women employed in the unorganised informal sector; to identify and address their critical needs; to mobilize them for joint economic and social action by resorting to group pressure; to demand their social and supportive political rights; to improve their entrepreneurial skills through training; to demand material inputs, credit and extension services necessary for working women and their families, such as childcare, education, health, and family planning.<sup>7</sup> Credit was a focal point. Moreover, in recognition of the potentially divisive factors of caste, religion, and politics within Indian society the Forum adopted certain strong ideological positions: the Forum would be pro-women, anti-caste and pro-secularism, anti-politics, and anti-dowry.<sup>8</sup>

### **What happens when self-employed women organise**

The act of organising gives rise to a large variety of experiences as the traditions, beliefs, relationships and structures begin to be challenged and shaken. Daku Bai, a village level worker in Daijar (Rajasthan) expresses the confidence gained from concrete gains when she says:

"The contractor of the road construction gang was paying us only Rs.3 a day. We found out that the minimum wage we should have been getting is Rs.11 or 7 kg of grain. We decided to do 'ekat'. We said we would not accept the wages till he paid us Rs.11 a day. He refused. We held out for two months. Then saw the Collector and told him of our problem. Ten days later the man came back and paid us the minimum wage and since then there has been no problem."<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, negative experiences such as loss of work, has a demoralising effect, as evident from the following excerpt:

"Organising the tribals is not an easy job. The Gram Vikas Sangh realised

that the workers of the Amli Kheda talab must be organised if they were to get any justice. We set about doing so and every contractor, his hired goons, sarpanch, mukhiyas and government officials, used every tactic and ploy to make sure we could not organise the workers. Endless rumours were spread by them, sections of the workers were bribed and told to attack us, the panchayat samiti pradhan was vociferous in his propaganda against us. He stated the story that we were against any development taking place in this area and were trying to sabotage the talab by stopping work. This was a good step and the contractor and officials hurriedly backed it up by cutting down on work and putting the blame on us. Many tribal labourers turned against us and felt we were depriving them of a chance to work. The contractor stopped work in the talab in April due to some differences with the Irrigation Department over the cost of carting earth to the work site. The real reason for stopping work has never been revealed to the workers by the officials, instead they say it is because the workers dared to raise their heads and ask for better wages. Till today, 31st December 1983, work has not been resumed and the blame is being put on us. These rumours have had many negative results in our attempts to organise the poor. For instance, we got reports that tribals working on projects of the Soil Conservation Department in the village of Partipura were being done out of their full wages and there were many other irregularities. Some workers approached us for help but the reaction of the majority of the workers was to beg us not to interfere as work may be stopped altogether and they would lose even the paltry Rs.3, they were earning."<sup>10</sup>

Humiliation and ridicule cause the sparks which help women to organise, to die out, and other women hearing of the experience will be less willing to try to organise.

**Issues around which self-employed women organise:** Despite regional, caste, community and other differences there is a commonality about the economic and social issues around which poor women organise. Moreover, they organise on several issues at a time and these generally overlap, reinforce, and complement each other. Some of the major issues are: land, space for vendors, developing alternative production systems, access to credit, access to health and childcare services, alcoholism, rape, violence and sexual harassment, and legal and policy changes.

**Methods used in organising:** These are as diverse as the workers' groups themselves. Common to all is intensive contact with individuals and groups of workers through which workers build up trust and faith in each other and in the organizers, who may not be workers. Self-employed women have to develop their self-esteem and self-concept as workers and this is best done, if, through intensive contact.

Surveys of workers and their working and living conditions have many advantages -- they reveal women's real problems and needs, help in building strength

and unity because women's individual experiences are collectivised in the process, and result in records and documentation of workers' experiences which can be used for lobbying action. In addition, the data and the new awareness generated can be channelised for confrontation and also for developmental action. Training is an important way of developing individuals and groups of workers, and equipping them for the various tasks and skills that are required in the organising process. Leadership, consciousness-raising and public speaking sessions are among the training inputs essential for all organising strategies.

Small group meetings are an ideal forum for developing strength, unity, support and confidence. In this non-threatening milieu, workers find they can speak out, many for the first time ever, and express their ideas, needs, and hopes. In addition, as the group-feeling develops a sense of solidarity and unity emerges. Public meetings and rallies give the workers a great feeling of strength and reveal to those in power the workers' strength, power and determination. The workers become visible, not just to each other but to policy makers, planners and the public at large. Linkages between groups of women are formed at such events, and just meeting their 'sisters in struggle' leads to a sense of elation and a mood of optimism and energy.

Collective bargaining or negotiation is used by some workers -- they literally sit face-to-face with employers or landlords and negotiate a settlement acceptable to both. Workers involved in this process have to be confident and conversant with negotiating skills and be careful they are not victimised later by their employers. Furthermore, the problem of how to ensure that the agreement is honoured must be considered.

Gheraos (Physically surrounding and thus immobilising the employer or other authority), dharnas (sit-ins), satyagraha (non-violent non-cooperation), morchas (processions), courting arrest, and other methods of non-violent resistance are very commonly used as methods of confrontation all over the country. Strikes are also effective means of revealing the workers' strength, unity, and determination, though they are particularly difficult for self-employed women to join because they are poor and vulnerable and have no reserves. Yet women do choose this method -- Andhra Pradesh agricultural labourers in Aswaraopet block struck for higher wages and in Rajasthan, sweepers in Jaipur stopped work for better wages, cleaning equipment, and overall working conditions.

When alliances are made between groups of workers in different regions on common issues it helps them to build strength and unity for the processes of confrontation and lobbying because the pressure of the groups increases. Tobacco workers in Karnataka and Gujarat, for example, are working together to fight against the mechanisation of the industry which will displace the workers. Some self-employed workers also ally with political parties/movements as this increases their strength and clout, such as the alliance between agricultural workers and the Shetkari Sanghathana in Maharashtra.

Although a powerful tool is the communication media, workers have to struggle to get seen, heard, or appear in print. This is because much of the media is accustomed to viewing workers' struggles from a middle-class perspective and vested interests, through their social connections or through economic pressure, are able to buy off the media. The film 'Anjuman' in which the Chikan workers of Lucknow participated, is a notable exception.

Lobbying through representation in policy-making bodies in the regional, national and international levels is also crucial, since decisions reached therein are far-reaching and affect the economic climate in direct and indirect ways. This also strengthens unity, it boosts the workers' morale to know that their voices are being heard at some of the top decision-making levels, and has a great role in ensuring that developmental activities are encouraged and speedily implemented.

Lastly, when self-employed women workers form organisations they become a formal entity, though they may not have a legal structure, as among the traditional women's organisations, such as the Shinalongs of the Naga tribes. Although unregistered groups have the advantages of being more informal and less bureaucratic, there is a basic disadvantage: when the immediate need for which the workers organised is satisfied (and, sometimes, even though it is not satisfied) the group disintegrates as there is no inbuilt incentive or pressure for the group to remain cohesive. On the other hand, a legal entity with its set procedures of periodic meetings and activities provides a means for members to continually interact and come together.

### **Men and Women: Organising together and separately**

This issue has been explored theoretically as well as practically by many different groups all over the country. Earlier movements involving social change for the poor did not specifically tackle the issues of women's oppression. Where this oppression was recognised it was assumed that when the revolution came, women's oppression would disappear along with all other oppressions. Within the Nationalist Movement women's liberation was never seen as a priority. Although women participated actively in many workers' movements the problems that arose out of their roles and their oppression by their menfolk, were never appreciated.

The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) for the first time highlighted the inequalities suffered by women as a sex, and women's groups began to gain in strength and to address issues specific to women. In the context of the larger movements for social change there was almost uniform resistance to women raising women-specific questions, because, it was held, this would cause internal dissension; also, many of the male activists had a low opinion of women. However, as the women's movement has gathered momentum male activists have had to come to terms with women's issues. The experiences of the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini activists in Bihar during the Bodhgaya struggle, and those of the Shramik Sanghathana in Dhulia district, are cases in point. Most

organisations have recognised that to build a movement of poor self-employed women it is necessary to have a separate organisation of women, some of the reasons for which are: Indian society does not encourage women to participate in mixed meetings; in many cultures women still have to observe purdah in front of men; men do not appreciate women voicing their views, or even their having any. In such a restricted cultural climate it is difficult for a woman to learn to overcome her fears and speak up in a meeting. Moreover, they often have different priorities from men (such as alcoholism and wife beating) which are not given importance in mixed organisations. The most dramatic example of the special issues of women being rejected is that of SEWA, which was thrown out of its parent trade union, the Textile Labour Association, because it was too assertive regarding the issues of poor women in the unorganised sector.

On the other hand, the basic economic issues of the self-employed are the same and unless men and women are struggling side-by-side these issues cannot be comprehensively addressed. Also, the problems of women's oppression cannot be solved by women alone, but must be understood and tackled by men and women together. Mixed organisations have tried to resolve this by having a separate women's wing within their fold, as in the CITU, INTUC, AITUC, HMS, BMS, and many political parties. Others have formed a separate women's organisation within their fold, such as the Mahila Mukti Morcha in the CMSS. Yet others, such as SEWA and the WWF, have attempted integration by affiliating with larger federations and by keeping close links and networking with other groups.

### **Problems in organising**

**Opposition to organising:** Organising means challenging the status quo in society and opposing vested interests, as well as confronting one's own internal fears and weaknesses. In both rural and urban areas powerful groups like landlords, merchants, and contractors use their might to prevent women from organising: they disrupt and attempt to destroy any organising efforts and openly demonstrate their hostility.

Gopa Joshi describes the opposition and hostility faced by women leaders in the Chipko movement:

"In June, when I, with two friends of the trees (dalian ka dagaria) visited the village to study the role of women, we were confronted by a hostile mob of the headman's henchmen. They asked why we had not sought the headman's permission to enter the village."<sup>11</sup>

These same powerful men use the trump card of stopping employment to harass and intimidate especially the leaders or trouble makers. Describing how the workers' leader Hava Bibi was victimised during the organising of bidi workers in Patan, Gujarat, Renana Jhabvala, the Secretary of SEWA, says:



We get a frantic letter from Hava Bibi, "My contractor has stopped giving me work. He says if you want work go to SEWA" -- Anasuya (the organiser) takes the next bus to Patan. "Hava Bibi is not getting work," Anasuya reports on her return the next day, "her daughter is ill and her husband has TB. She has no food in her house. She does not even have anything to pawn. I went to see the contractor, Bhure Khan, to persuade him to take Hava Bibi back. But he only shouted at me, 'Go back to Ahmedabad. You are spoiling our (Muslim) women with your loose ways.'"

Karma Bibi, who had accompanied Anasuya, explains: "Everybody is afraid. The contractors are making an example of Hava Bibi."<sup>12</sup>

Often the power groups themselves organise in order to squash women's organising efforts. By virtue of their status, social and political connections, and through bribery, they may even manage to enlist the assistance of the local police and bureaucracy. For example, the activists of the Ibrahimpatnam Taluka Agricultural Labourers Union complained that:

1200 acres of rich fertile land has been occupied by a single landlord. The people of this village pleaded with the Government to take over this benami land, and distribute it among the landless. Three months ago, when the people cleared the land of shrubs in a symbolic attempt to focus on the problem, the landlord called in the police and had persons arrested. When the people wanted to hold a public meeting, the police refused to give permission for public address. Even after the High Court gave permission, the mike was snatched away by the C.I. saying 'Go crying to your High Court.' The women of this village have been the most active, leading in all the protests, dharnas and meetings.<sup>13</sup>

Violence is commonly used, and takes the form of beatings, torture and killings, either perpetrated by the dominant groups themselves, or by their private militias, as in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and other states. The activists of the Chhatra Sangharsh Vahini in Bihar describe the violence used against the labourers in the struggle for land against the Bodh Gaya Math:

"In November, 1978, the labourers, activists of Persa village decided to reap the crop but keep it for themselves instead of taking it to the Math. In the Bodh Gaya Struggle, all programmes are usually publicly announced in advance. Therefore, the Math had time to prepare itself. Early in the morning, hired ruffians and musclemen of the Math surrounded the fields.

The Math spread police and goonda terror throughout the area. There were many incidents of ruffians waylaying and beating the villagers, abusing the women and threatening to rape them. Dozens of false cases were registered in local courts against the villagers. Individuals would be arrested from the marketplaces, so that no collective resistance was possible. Every effort was made to frighten the women and girls. It became dangerous for women to go out alone or even to go out at all at night.

In one incident, one of the Vahini activists, a tribal girl named Alice Kanchan, was going from one village to another, when she was accosted by some ruffian youths, beaten, abused, and insulted, her clothes were torn. Jankidas, who was with her, was also beaten up.”<sup>14</sup>

Similar tactics were used against women involved in an anti-liquor struggle in Uttar Pradesh:

“In Menagi Village, last April, a number of men were sitting together in a house and drinking. Vaishakhi Devi immediately took a lantern and set out to stop them. The drunkards grabbed the lantern, threw it at Vaishakhi Devi and, as her clothes caught fire, pushed her into a wheatfield. Vaishakhi Devi was badly burnt from her chest to her knees.”<sup>15</sup>

Another very common method of trying to subdue women's organising efforts or questioning of the existing exploitative system is sexual exploitation or harassment. The most violent form of this is rape.

Sexual innuendo is sometimes the first stage of brutal sexual attacks on women who insist on fighting for social justice. “My sister Maria always stood up to the Dadas”, says Honorita, living in Bombay's Dharavi slum. “Near her house there was an illicit brewery where goondas used to congregate and there was a ‘rada’ every night. Maria organised all the women of the area, and they went to the Municipal corporator, the police, the mayor and even the Chief Minister. Finally they managed to close down the brewery. The Dadas were very angry and spread rumours that Maria was a loose woman. They began shouting crude remarks at her. But still Maria did not let them re-open their distillery. Then one evening as she was returning from her shopping three goondas pounced on her, dragged her behind a shed and beat and raped her. The police wouldn't even register her complaint.”

The tactic of singling out those who are ‘weak’ or in a particularly disadvantaged situation is also commonly used. Widows, and other single women, as well as the poorest of workers are always singled out and pressurised or even dismissed.

“The story of Yashoda of Yacharen village in Andhra Pradesh of Vyavasaya Coolie Sangam is a good example of this.

Yashoda's husband, Malla Reddy, was a bonded labourer. The burden of supporting the family of three daughters fell on Yashoda, who works as a labourer. One day, the landlord under whom Malla worked came to know that Malla was taking interest in a newly formed labourers' organisation, the Vyavasaya Coolie Sangam, which was fighting to wipe out bondedness and to get a reasonable wage for labourers. As a punishment, the landlord confiscated Yashoda's cattle.”<sup>16</sup>

A woman is surrounded by restrictions and obstacles not only in her work and her community, but even in her family. If a woman wants to do something unusual like going to a meeting, she usually has to seek the permission of the males in her household. And often this permission is not forthcoming. The man may feel his authority threatened if his wife goes out and he may resort to violence to stop her. He may also try to restrain his wife because of external pressures on him. When women challenge the status quo, the powerful groups, instead of directly dealing with the women, may approach the menfolk and order them to put pressure on their wives or daughters. Men are sometimes more vulnerable to such pressures as their employment benefits or safety may depend on these powerful groups. This is obvious from the experiences of the women of Himachal Pradesh who had organised a Padayatra to protest against the opening of liquor shops: it was the pressure from their menfolk that prevented 200-300 women from coming. Some of the men were motivated by their own alcohol-dependence, others were unwilling to allow their women any independent action, and yet others were pressurised by local politicians and village leaders who did not want to see the women's strength grow, particularly since they gain much of their wealth and power from liquor vending.

**Internal weakness:** The external obstacles to organising are further reinforced by the women's own internal weaknesses: through their weak self-image and their inter-group divisions poor women themselves perpetuate their own oppression.

Many organisations have found that one of the major obstacles to unity is caste divisions. Women of slightly higher castes are reluctant to sit with or meet with women of lower castes; the question of identifying with each other through their common economic conditions is far removed. In areas where communal tensions have dominated, women of different religions become divided though their occupation may be the same, and organisations like SEWA Gujarat and SEWA Singbhum have had to make special efforts to keep their members united.

A tremendous block is formed by the women's own self-perceptions: they see themselves as weak, powerless and ignorant, and as a result lack the confidence to take positive action. Having been socialised into the existing systems that undervalue their role and work, they perceive neither themselves nor other women as workers.

Thus when organisers first go into an area they find that women are often disparaging about their capacity for action. Women come out with statements like "We are illiterate", "We are ignorant". Very often they feel that even if they are ready to organise, other women will not support them. They tend to undervalue their own qualities and make remarks like "Hamari to takdeer hi phooti hai, hum kya kar sakte hai?"

**The economic system and oppression:** The greatest and most fundamental obstacle to organising is the very structure of our economic system which forces women to cling to their subsistence-level work as they are offered no alternative.

Women struggle for survival in the lowest categories of employment and their all goes into this unequal battle. If a woman misses her day's work to go to a meeting she and her children may not eat that day.

Instead of constantly expanding work opportunities to meet the needs of a growing population our economy reduces even those opportunities that do exist. Mechanisation of industrial and artisanal production and agriculture, and destruction of natural resources destroy the means of livelihood of the poor who have to turn away from their traditional methods of production and enter into an intensely competitive dog-eat-dog struggle for the ever-decreasing work available to them.

### **Organising successfully**

In spite of the obstacles, in spite of the opposition, in spite of the struggle at subsistence level women do sometimes manage to organise. And when they do, it is an empowering, positive experience. Organising changes in the world of the women, it changes their self-perception, it changes their relations with others, it changes the society around them and often it causes larger political changes.

The most obvious advantage of organising is that it gives the women tangible, concrete gains:

- Women actually acquired and tilled land in the Bodh Gaya struggle. As one of the women, Malan, said, "Didi, we have got just an acre of land. It is not as if we have got a lot to eat but how can we say it has made no difference? It has made a difference."
- In Nipani, the tobacco workers' wages increased and, with it, their lifestyle.
- AMM succeeded in giving loans at 4% interest per annum while money lenders charged 120% per annum.
- Alternative housing was created by SPARC for pavement dwellers in Bombay whose houses were destroyed.
- Landless labourers formed milk cooperatives, acquired cattle and began earning with the help of SEWA.
- Some liquor shops were closed down in HP after struggle by SUTRA women.
- The iron ore mine workers who were employed on contract basis were successful in raising their daily wages from Rs.4 to Rs.19 after organising into CMSS.

To a poor woman who has much to lose and is very weak and vulnerable, gaining a tangible benefit means much more than can be measured in concrete

terms. As Malan of Bodh Gaya says:

"Didi, earlier, we had tongues but could not speak, we had feet but could not walk. Now that we have got the land, we have got the strength to speak and to walk."<sup>17</sup>

However, a tangible gain is only possible when the organising attempt begins to break through many of the stereotypes and the opposition to the poor women. A successful organising attempt begins to change the perception of society at many different levels, in a snowballing effect. Thus the problem of hill women of Garhwal was converted through the Chipko Movement into a national issue.

As women begin to be honoured outside their homes, so also the attitude of their menfolk change. Talking about the change in the attitude of men in the villages of Andhra Pradesh where women had been organising, Maria Mies says:

"Men did the cooking for the common meal for the women, and were supposed to look after the children. This active participation of the men was in itself a great achievement and can be seen as a sign that the women's sangams had grown in importance."<sup>18</sup>

The most decisive change that occurs in the organising process is the alteration in the personalities of the women taking part in the organisation. The more active a woman is in the organising, the more she empowers herself, the more both her perception towards herself and her life changes.

Laro Janko a woman activist in the Bihar mines was afraid to speak in public. "I kept thinking like this and began to get worried. I thought why can't I speak? I will certainly speak. I got a 'khatpata' in my heart, I became restless. One day I was asked to speak in a meeting. I did not speak very forcefully. Baap re baap. I felt so ashamed of the way I had spoken. I felt like covering myself with a lid. My body was trembling. But they kept giving me opportunities to speak in meetings. After speaking a number of times I began to get a heat in my head.

Then when the mines closed down, throwing us all out of employment, we struggled for reopening the mines. The management attacked us with hired ruffians, police, military police, police women. That time, I was really filled with heat and abused the management. Since that day the heat has gone up into my head."<sup>35</sup>

The release of internal energy generates a creative power whereby the woman develops talents and skills she never had before. Her dormant creative powers begin to awake.

"In Rajasthan thousands of poor rural women have gathered, they sing and dance and some of them discover a vein of poetry in themselves and compose

songs suitable to their issues and struggles.”<sup>19</sup>

As her creative power is released, the woman begins to feel more in control of her life, of her body, of the events surrounding her. As a woman's self-confidence increases, as she feels more powerful, she begins to break out of the cocoon of her everyday existence. She begins to perceive the larger world, she herself begins to feel a part of the larger world and she begins to perceive the larger forces of exploitation and sees her role in the larger struggle for justice. Until now she has been pursuing single mindedly the struggle for survival and everyday earning. Now her view broadens and she thinks about her life, beyond today. Savings, preventive approaches to health, family planning, become an important part of her life.

The WDP programme in Rajasthan found that after organising in villages women insisted on going for sterilization even though earlier they had completely rejected the family planning campaign. Similarly, women asked for adult education, saying, “Ab to angootha lagane me sharam aye!”

The process of organising helps a woman to break out of her preconceived self image as only mother, wife, household drudge. She becomes a worker along with other workers. Sometimes she becomes a leader of a group.

Shushila Naik, a tobacco processing worker in Nipani, was elected a leader. She was much younger than other workers. She was illiterate, she was a devdasi and yet, because of her strong personality, her determination and strength, she became the leader. Once, when she was asked, “What would you have done if you had not joined the union? How would you have found an outlet for your talents?” Her reply was illuminating, “Probably, my talents would not have been discovered. I would not have remained worker. Since I have a good singing voice, I would have joined a group of singing devdasis.”

Organising is a process whereby the individual has to break out of her isolation and consider herself part of a larger group which acts cohesively. Organising is to create a united group of people acting together on issues of mutual concern. The creation of such a group breaks down the divisions between women. As women of different castes, different religions, and different communities sit together in meetings, protest together, eat together, think together, the social divisions begin to break down. This is the true meaning of communal integration.

Despite the numerous and complex impediments to organising, self-employed women workers do organize and struggle, with extraordinary courage and strength. Reports from all over the country are a testimony to their commitment to overcome the various crises and barriers which appear, at first, insurmountable.

### **The State and organising**

The relationship between the state and groups of women who try to organise

is incredibly complex as the state contains within itself a variety of forces, often contradictory to each other. While the Indian constitution is a document remarkable for its leaning towards justice and equality, it is highly abstract and the principles suffer in implementation.

The constitution directs the Indian State to follow the path of electoral democracy for its political system. This means that the polity has to be responsible to the needs and aspirations of its electorate. Here again the state is pulled in contradictory directions as the needs and desires of different sections of the population are often quite in contrast to each other. The self-employed women constitute a majority of the female population and in sheer numbers are an important section of the electorate. However, the vested interests on the other hand are equally important. The political elite itself is part of the economic and social elites. Also, the financing of electoral politics and political parties comes from the economically powerful groups.

The State is responsible to groups which achieve a certain quality that Nirmala Banerjee calls "political visibility":

"This amorphous quality, which can be called the political visibility of the group, is not really a strict reflection of the number of votes of the workers involved. Rather it is the possibility of how far support to that group would reflect favourably on the image of the political party concerned. This political visibility has several dimensions. A group firstly has to be visible to itself to feel its distinct identity and appreciate its political importance. The visibility of a particular group to political parties is also a matter of social links between political leaders and members of the group.

For getting political support a group has also to develop means of getting public support for its cause. Political visibility is not only an additional attribute in determining workers' relative status but it is also the process through which various other qualities of groups of workers get recognition in the form of better or worse working conditions." <sup>20</sup>

Self-employed women are, in these terms, politically invisible. They have neither a distinct identity, nor political importance. They belong to social classes much inferior to those of the political leaders and have practically no means of getting public support for their cause. Without this political visibility they remain vulnerable to other more politically powerful interests.

The State recognises workers as an important section of the population which tends to be oppressed and exploited by commercial interests. The State recognises the need to protect these workers and has passed a large number of labour laws. There is extensive government machinery in the form of a Labour Ministry, at the national as well as the State levels, which is set up to enforce these laws. The labour officers and inspectors reach right down to the Taluka level.

Although much of the labour machinery and the labour laws pertain to the formal sector, there are a number of laws, which if strictly enforced, will provide simple protection to self-employed women. These include the Minimum Wages Act, the Inter-State Migrant Labour (Protection and Welfare) Act, the Contractor Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, and the Equal Remuneration Act. Not only does the state seek to enforce protection but it also tries to encourage the workers to organise. The Trade Union Act ensures the fundamental right to organise and provides a model for trade union building. The Industrial Disputes Act provides (at least theoretically) protection against victimisation for organising.

The State goes one step further and encourages workers to organise by giving them awareness training through the Central Board of Workers' Education. The CBWE, with its branches in every state, runs classes which inform workers of their rights, and encourages them to unite and to join trade unions. Similarly, the National Labour Institute carries out camps of unorganised workers to encourage them to organise.

However, in spite of these efforts by the State, self-employed workers are left largely unprotected and unorganised. As the Commission has found in its tours, very few, if any, of the labour laws are enforced outside the formal sector, and there are practically no unions which include self-employed workers.

One reason is that only very recently have self-employed women begun to be recognised as "workers". It is only in the last 5-6 years that the 'unorganised labour' and 'rural labour' have been recognised as part of the labour force to be protected by the labour machinery.

Another, and more dangerous, reason is that when groups of workers organise to seek implementation of labour laws, other agencies of the state tend to side with the exploiter to prevent the organising. The police, for example, see a legitimate demand for minimum wages, or release of bonded labour as a 'law and order problem' and often treat the workers quite brutally, thereby suppressing all motivation to organise.

Implementation of the labour laws is often seen by certain vested groups as harmful to their economic interests, and they lobby with the government to prevent the implementation. Caught in a conflict of interests the government often backs away from implementation.

"SEWA had organised homebased garment workers in Gujarat" says Dhangauribehn, Executive Committee member of SEWA, "but we found that they were not included in the schedule and so there was no minimum wage for them. We applied to the State Labour Ministry to notify Minimum Wages. Although the office of the Labour Commissioner prepared the Draft Notification, it never came out. Later, we found out that the All India Garment Manufacturers' Association had submitted a memorandum to the Labour Ministry as well as Ministry of



Industries, saying that if Minimum Wages was declared they would shift all garment work out of Gujarat State.”

The State has created a special department to deal with the “welfare” aspect of society. The Social Welfare and Social Defence Ministries as well as the Central Social Welfare Board supply this service. These government departments are meant to deal with the weakest, most vulnerable sections of society which include the self-employed women. The original mandate of these departments was to dole out welfare, the idea being that these weak sections cannot help themselves and would always be weak and so the welfare was a form of ‘relief’. However, that concept is changing now. There is a growing recognition that ‘weak sections’ are not by nature weak, but are only so because of their position in society. If these weak and vulnerable sections are better organised and at the same time have support from the government, they too can become strong.

The Rural Awareness Camps sponsored by the Central Social Welfare Board are an example of such an approach; the success of this is illustrated by SUTRA’s organising attempts in Himachal Pradesh. Ironically, it also reveals how the organising attempts of poor women supported by one section of the state, may run into opposition from vested interests supported by another sector of the state.

It has been the policy of the State to encourage the poor to develop economic alternatives by organising themselves into production, consumer and service cooperatives. The cooperative is seen as a form of organisation by which the weak and vulnerable can collectively protest against exploitation. The State actively encourages cooperativisation by providing subsidies, soft loans, protected markets, etc. The cooperative departments in each state train cooperative members in the principles of cooperation as well as in the skills of running a cooperative, such as management, accounting, etc. Recently many states have introduced special incentives for poor women to form cooperatives: the cooperative movement is also encouraged among the landless or poor rural people. However, as in the case of labour laws, the impact of such government support to organise cooperatives has been negligible. According to Samakhya, a voluntary organisation in Andhra Pradesh which has studied cooperatives in detail:

“Cooperative laws which were of an enabling nature, soon enough changed to those of a controlling nature and in more recent times, when even control was not found to be enough, amendments were made to let cooperatives be managed by government, accountable to government, to be used by government for its schemes. Cooperatives which wish to maintain their autonomy, their sense of accountability to their members, do so at considerable risk and often go through the most traumatic experiences, as we in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (to name a few states where cooperatives have been denied elections) will know.”

There are two opposite streams of thought within the government itself as

to how development should reach the people. One is the 'beneficiary approach': the government is perceived as the benefactor, the giver and the people are passive and receiver. The government controls, the people are controlled. The approach sees the process as one of ruler and the ruled.

The second is the 'involvement approach'. People are perceived of as involved in the process of development. Their needs, their aspirations, are reflected in government programmes and their energies, their commitments are involved in the implementation.

The last 40 years of development have shown that for the weaker sections such as self-employed women, the purely beneficiary approach will not work, that unless the vulnerable sections are organised, the fruits of development will not reach them but will be appropriated by the more powerful groups. This recognition has prompted the government at state and national levels to promote all kinds of women's organisations — Mahila Mandals, Mahila Samajams, Mahila Sangams, etc. However, even within the promotion of women's organisations the different beneficiary or involvement approaches can be observed.

A good example of the beneficiary approach to promoting women's organisations is the UP government's sponsorship of the women's organisation 'Akanksha'. Akanksha was formed, not as an impulsive move by self-employed women, but by a notification issued by the State Government on December 1, 1986. As can be seen, this women's organisation is purely an arm of the government itself.

In contrast is the Women's Development Programme, again of the government of Rajasthan, which is based completely on the involvement approach.

The WDP is one of the most significant programmes of the government, spread over six districts of Rajasthan, covering 300 gram panchayats. It is unique in many ways. For a start, it has brought together the Government, voluntary agencies, and research groups, a programme in which "the policy makers have adopted a vote of humility."

The government and the voluntary agencies have been working well and with understanding. Officials understand that there are certain aspects, like training, better handled by voluntary workers. And the activists appear to have shed their usual bias against anything to do with the Government ('Yeh to Sarkari Hai').

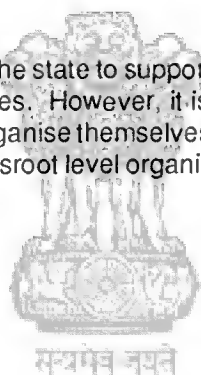
A consistent pattern that emerges is that when the state is sympathetic to the issues of the poor women and supportive to their organising efforts, the women certainly do organise and succeed in their struggles. Government's help creates a support structure where none existed before. At a seminar organised by the Ministry of Labour on Organising Unorganised Rural Labour, sponsored by the Ministry of Labour, one of the participants, Rajesh Tandon, reports:

“When the participants (from a rural training camp) described their achievements two factors were almost invariably present in each of them. These were the level of organised action and the degree of support from local officials. The data suggested that the higher the level of organised action and the greater the degree of official support, the better were the chances of success.”

If we accept that women's problems are not going to be solved in the course of the current type of development, then we are looking for a political solution— a method of giving additional priority in state policies to measures for helping these women. As past experience has shown, there is little chance of even existing facilities like education, primary health services, or access to capital ever reaching these women at sufficient and sustainable levels unless they build up an organised pressure.

Left only to voluntary agencies and the poor women's own organised efforts, it is unlikely that these kinds of organisations will come up quickly enough in sufficiently large numbers to make a significant impression on the situation of these women.

It is rather ironic to ask the state to support a machinery which is to promote action for change in state policies. However, it is recommended that to create an atmosphere for the women to organise themselves, the state should initiate and help in maintaining a network of grassroot level organising efforts, on something like the WDP Rajasthan model.



## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Approach

The coverage of the Commission has been extensive, in taking into account the entire gamut of poor labouring women, among whom deprivation and discrimination are common to all. They suffer from lack of opportunity to work, low and discriminatory wages and exploitative conditions, resulting in casualisation. They lack social security, face occupational health hazards, they do not have access to new technologies, skills, and knowledge. While making recommendations, the National Commission has made suggestions which should break the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy, low productivity, discriminatory wages, subsistence level of existence, large families, poor health, and increasing unemployment, all leading to greater poverty.

It is imperative to recognize women's role as major earners of the family and not as marginal and supplementary contributors. At least 1/3rd of the households are solely supported by women and another 1/3rd receive at least 50 per cent contribution from women. Therefore, while fixing financial and physical targets and allocating resources this reality should be kept in view. Such households should be specifically identified at the village level and covered by all programmes.

The National Commission recommends that all subsequent data collection efforts should enlarge the definition of women workers to include all such activities, paid and unpaid, performed within the home or outside, as an employee or on own account.

Although the existing development/fiscal policies in theory do not discriminate against women, in reality they have not led to strengthening women. The reasons for this powerlessness are a. the general image of women as subordinates which is reflected in the implementation of these policies that leads to men becoming the major beneficiaries, and, b. the need of vested interests to keep women subordinate in order to exploit their cheap labour and submissive attitude. The Commission's studies have revealed that women, when given facilities and resources, have demonstrated high productivity, a better record of repayment of loans, and assets are safeguarded and not disposed of.

Thus, the Commission strongly recommends that if we are serious about substantially improving the economic status of poor women working in the informal sectors of the economy, we have to devise concrete strategies which can help to enhance the ownership of and the control over productive assets by these women. Perhaps it will be the single most important intervention towards both their empowerment and economic well-being. Some of the assets that women can be given are

a plot of land, housing, tree patta, joint ownership of all assets transferred by the State to the family, live-stock licence, bank accounts, membership of organisations, and identity cards.

### **Planning and monitoring**

The National Commission is of the view that the planning process carried out at all levels, including the Planning Commission and the State Planning Boards do not sharply focus their attention on the realistic situation of labouring women, who are unprotected workers, largely invisible, easy subjects of exploitation, unorganised, illiterate, struggling to survive in adverse conditions and who are facing a biased and insensitive administrative machinery at the field level. The macro policies and programmes of the Government have resulted in eroding the employment opportunities of these women while ignoring their urgent needs.

The Commission, therefore, recommends that allocation of resources has to be enhanced in basic areas like education, health, rural and small industry, drinking water, and housing. In the beginning of the First Plan, it was considered necessary in the interest of the country that certain heavy capital investments be made to provide the necessary infrastructure requirement for development. However, on the basis of experience, if investments are not made in developmental human resources such capital investments become counter-productive. The Commission strongly recommends that, to begin with, 50 per cent of the benefits of investment but in no case less than 30 per cent, should flow to women.

The Report fully documents the fact that women perform multifarious activities in the home and outside. Also, their working conditions are closely linked to their living conditions; for example, their homes are at times also their work place and the place to keep fodder, fuels and animals. The Commission, therefore, recommends that in planning a basic strategy should be evolved, the underlying objective of which should be to have an integrated and holistic approach towards tackling women's basic issues. This strategy should aim at:

- a. ensuring them fuel, fodder and water for meeting their basic requirements.
- b. strengthening their existing employment by providing appropriate support in the areas of skill, training, credit and marketing.
- c. protecting their employment in the sectors where it is declining due to technological advancements.
- d. creating new employment opportunities for them, based on local markets for mass consumption goods.
- e. protecting women workers from casualisation and contractualisation which

lead to their exploitation.

- f. provide supportive services to women like housing, toilets and childcare facilities.
- g. proper and effective implementation of industrial and protective legislations.

To meet these objectives, the first step will be to formulate a set of macro policies in various areas which are well-integrated with each other, like:

- a. formulation of an integrated strategy for the use of natural resources like land, water and forests keeping in mind the fuel, fodder and water requirements of the poor.
- b. an integrated strategy for industrial development for the healthy growth the three sectors of industries, namely the large scale sector, the small scale sector and the traditional sector need to be promoted.
- c. the industrial policy will also have to be linked meaningfully with the policy pertaining to natural resources so that resource-use is directed towards creating employment opportunities for the poor, and specially for women and does not deprive them of raw materials at a reasonable price.
- d. anti-poverty programmes will have to be reformulated in the light of the above policies so that they supplement and complement the development process.

In view of the above, individual macro policies will have to be modified and strengthened in line with the basic developmental strategy. This will also involve taking care of women's needs. The technology policy, the licencing policy, the credit policy, the policy pertaining to training, marketing and raw materials will all have to be reformulated to meet the new needs.

The Commission is of the view that in no Ministry/Department or semi-government agency, should women be marginalised. If the responsibility of looking after the interests of women is given to one agency, the tendency is that the other agencies do not look upon women as their main responsibility. Being aware of this trap and of the fact that women should be in the mainstream, the Commission strongly recommends that every agency of the Government should be responsible to ensure that their planned resources and programmes benefit men and women equally. Besides fixing this responsibility, there should be a Monitoring Cell in each agency which should be able to monitor and evaluate the utilisation of the resources and the implementation of the programmes vis-a-vis women. Every agency should have this cell. However, there should be nodal agencies in the central and state Governments which could oversee, liaise, and push through programmes of other

Ministries/Departments relating to women. To begin with, monitoring cells in the Planning Commission and the Department of Women and Child Development in the Government of India, should be strengthened. The Department of Women and Child Development has taken on this task, but it has not yet become very effective. A strategy should be evolved to see how the results of the monitoring and evaluation can be effectively conveyed to the concerned agencies and the necessary changes implemented by them.

More important than the Central Government for the purposes of monitoring are the State Governments. In the state governments, the Commission recommends that a Development Commissioner for Women in the rank of the Financial Commissioner should be appointed. He/she should have enough seniority vis-a-vis the other Secretaries looking after development programmes so that he/she can coordinate the activities of other Departments. This is necessary as women perform multi-faceted activities and they do not always come under one department/agency. Besides, imaginative programmes and projects have to be formulated for them which may come under the purview of more than one department. Apart from coordination, review meetings would be held periodically under the Development Commissioner for Women.

Similarly, at the district level there should be district-co-ordination officer somewhat equivalent to the status of the District Collector who could be put in charge of planning, monitoring, coordination and evaluation of all programmes affecting women. We may take the experience of Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) which has become acceptable to the people at large and the state governments, irrespective of their political ideology of the States, because, to begin with, the Central Government financially aided the state governments in setting up some posts under the ICDS. The Commission is conscious of the constraint in resources, but would recommend that the Central Government should assist the States in creating such posts at the departmental and district level; otherwise, the tendency is to make an officer additionally in charge of this work which does not yield the necessary results. The functionaries entrusted with monitoring work may also be involved in the planning process as needs of women, related to their economic activities, differ from region to region. Like the ICDS, the experiment may be started in a few districts, preferably the backward tribal areas.

In carrying out monitoring and evaluation, the government functionaries should liaise with voluntary agencies working for women, mahila mandals and representatives of the rural women, to get a proper feedback about the policies and the programmes affecting them. The communication gap between the delivery system and the affected women can be bridged only by involving women in planning and monitoring processes at appropriate levels.

## Employment policies and programmes

Women in the labour force contribute to family economy and the national economy although this contribution is not recognised. 94 per cent of them work in the unorganised sector, 83 per cent participate in agriculture, and other allied activities like dairying and animal husbandry. A sizeable portion of women are involved in construction activities. Regrettably, women of this sector do not have the necessary visibility and do not get the focus of attention of the planners and implementers.

The development strategies have practically ignored the contribution of women in the unorganised primary sectors and they have had no positive impact on the conditions of the labouring women who are exposed to a great deal of exploitation because of casualisation, contractualisation and piece-rate work. The Labour Commissioners of the States do not have the inclination or the time to devote their attention to either the rural or urban unorganised sector, and more than 90 per cent of their time is devoted to the organised sector constituting barely 10 per cent of the labour force. The labouring women work in pitiable condition with long hours of arduous work and receive discriminatory wages, with practically no social benefits and security. The Commission recommends the appointment of a separate Labour Commissioner, with supporting field staff, in every State, for unorganised workers.

The National Commission recommends that to enlarge the areas of employment for women, to improve their working conditions, to reduce their drudgery and to provide social security, a holistic and integrated approach be adopted. This is specially necessary since women do not perform one action and, therefore, a strait-jacket approach cannot be adopted.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture and allied fields provide the largest sector for women's employment. However, their contribution in these areas is not recognised. Women's access to land ownership is extremely limited. Land reforms have adversely affected the ownership of land by women even in those areas where traditionally women own some land. Women's membership in agrobased cooperatives is negligible. They do not have a say in decision making and in the use of credit, technology, and marketing. There is wage discrimination. The Commission observed that in certain areas, for the same kind of work, the women would get 3 to 4 rupees per day, while men would get about Rs.10 as wages. In many areas, minimum wages were not being paid to agricultural labour.

The Commission recommends that women's contribution to agriculture should be recognised by the policy makers and this should be reflected in the country's Agricultural Policy and Programmes. There should be adequate resource allocation and orientation of programmes for women producers.

Since women labour involved in agriculture have seasonal work to do, there



should be diversification of their activities in areas like horticulture, fruit processing, vegetable growing, animal husbandry, and dairying, through the organisation of women's cooperatives. The Mahila Mandals should be energised to promote more economic activities and assist women producers to get such inputs as subsidies and fertilisers.

The Commission has also observed that the number of women cultivators is declining. The distribution of surplus land has not gone to the poor women. Such distribution should be followed with concrete steps of providing assistance in improving the land and bringing it into cultivation.

The number of women extension workers should be increased at all levels and they should be provided information and training on all aspects of women producers' work and data on intra-house distribution of resources. They should also be provided with infrastructural support by improving the living and working conditions of the female extension staff with better housing, hostel and transport facilities.

Women should be mentioned as specific target groups for all agricultural development programmes and efforts should be made to involve them in decision making at all levels.

In the allied sectors of sericulture and animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, forests, handloom and handicrafts, the Commission recommends greater inputs of training and credit and, as in the case of agriculture, women's cooperatives should be encouraged, and they should have greater access to extension workers.

### **Fuel, fodder and water**

Large sections of women in the unorganised sector, living in rural areas, are involved in collection of fuel and fodder. With the process of deforestation, this task has become more strenuous as women have to walk long distances to collect fuel. Non-availability of grazing land has increased their problems. Social forestry was visualised both for satisfying the basic needs of rural households and for reducing pressures on the forests by generating resources for community needs outside the forest land. However, the programme, as implemented, has developed a slant in favour of the larger farmers and urban markets and industries, while the fuel-fodder crisis continues to grow. Government policies, in the last few decades, have hastened degradation and privatisation of the common property resources through land allotment policy. Illegal encroachments by large farmers and operation of market forces have led to further deterioration of the state of the common land.

The National Commission agrees with the recommendations of the Workshop on Women, Social Forestry and Wasteland Development, held by the Centre for Women's Development Studies as reported in their document:

1. If Social Forestry or Wasteland Development is to provide economic independence for women, it is essential to build in adequate wage and other technical/managerial support through the period of rearing, maintenance and protection of the plants.
2. The basic aim of social forestry should be to create village woodlots on a sustained-yield basis which will yield resources according to village needs.
3. Any social forestry programme which allows for clear felling of village woodlots must be avoided and only rotational harvesting should be permitted and a need-based cutting cycle should be worked out.
4. All social forestry programmes should be simultaneously agro-forestry programmes of which multi-layering and multi-cropping should be essential features, as per the local situation, to provide for both short and long term returns since the poor cannot wait for long. Species should be selected which complement each other.
5. Planning for the social forestry programme should be based on a long term rather than a short term perspective.
6. Women's access to productive resources under social forestry programmes should be backed by State marketing supports. At present, the market structure for their products is controlled by distant monopolistic agencies and intermediaries which deprive them of their just returns.
7. Direct benefits to women are in the form of wages. In consideration of the short term nature of the employment, and in view of the high financial output of the projects, the wages must be upwardly revised.
8. In all kinds of social forestry/wasteland development programmes, budgets must include provisions for the development of women's organisations.
9. Review of forest regulations is needed to make the achievement of social forestry goals possible.
10. Creation of tanks for water grown plants, and multi-layered useful plants below and above the soil, should be the basic strategy in community-controlled and community-managed soil forestry systems for involvement of women.
11. Equitable distribution of all products of social forestry like water, grass, fuel, fodder, fruits, tubercrops, and timber will ensure community participation, particularly by the womenfolk who are the most hard hit by environmental changes.

12. An effective and powerful supporting infrastructure for developing effective models of investment, management, protection and just distribution should be created at grassroots level for minimising drought, flood, unemployment, poverty and ensuring rural prosperity.
13. A number of such experimental models should be developed with total participation of village Mahila Mandals and Governmental functionaries, local people and various non-governmental agencies working at grassroots level for which support systems should be ensured.
14. This can generate a cyclical process for creating employment and resources which will have a demonstration effect. The funds generated could be ploughed back to make such projects self-sustaining, thus strengthening women's participation on a continuous basis.

Though there are close links between forestry, agriculture, food production, and water resources management systems, the macro policies of our Government which govern the use of these resources are based on a compartmentalised approaches to agriculture, forestry and water. The result is that policy in one sector has adversely affected the other sectors, which has deprived the poor of their life support systems and their resource base.

In the area of water resource development, major irrigation projects have not yielded expected results. The extent of utilisation of irrigation potential has been low. The cost of irrigation projects rises to prohibitive levels due to delay in implementation. The construction of large irrigation projects has led to the displacement of the poor without land compensation which has affected the women adversely.

The National Commission recommends that more resources should be put into watershed management areas and projects, with involvement of women, which will increase their opportunities of employment. Similarly, caution should be exercised in construction of irrigation dams and there should always be land compensation for the poor instead of cash compensation as with cash compensation they get permanently deprived of their livelihood. Effective water management in conjunction with management of our other natural resources is essential if we are to avert complete disaster. Local level Mahila Mandals should be effectively involved in the water management at the level of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The problem of safe drinking water is very acute. Impoverished women have to spend a number of hours every day and have to walk long distances to fetch water. This responsibility is exclusively theirs. The Commission, therefore, recommends accelerated thrust on providing water to villages. At present, 40 per cent of the villages are 'problem' villages with no water sources or remotely located water sources.

Women should be effectively involved in water storage, keeping in view the local conditions. The traditional methods of rainwater storage/conservation for drinking should be revived, improved and implemented. The emphasis must be on recharging groundwater sources for sustainable use. Storage facilities (tanks, reservoirs) at the household level must be expanded and viable schemes for providing pipe water in homes should be explored.

**Construction Workers:** The condition of women construction workers is pitiable. They face instability and insecurity of employment, low wages, non-observance of labour laws and bondage to the middleman who employs them without providing the facilities enjoined by legislation. Their life is perpetually in a state of flux as they have to keep migrating from site to site. The average wages for women construction workers are generally lower than their male counterparts. Further, women construction workers are almost always totally unskilled. There is no rational explanation why this should be so, since masonry or carpentry are not skills that are likely to require more physical prowess than the type of 'unskilled' work women normally carry out.

The National Commission recommends the following measures to elevate the working and living conditions of women construction workers:

1. There is need for much more stringent observance of existing laws with deterrent penalty clauses. There is unquestionable evidence from virtually all available studies on construction workers that there is flagrant violation of statutory provisions. In this context, it is necessary to provide legal literacy to construction workers, especially to women who also have special needs such as creches, maternity benefits and toilets.
2. The judicial procedures relating to non-observance of such laws have to be considerably simplified to ensure that the organised workers can obtain legal redress without undue harassment. The cooperation of voluntary organisations and people's action groups may be useful in this regard.
3. Much of the problem of non-implementation of legal provision can be traced to the institution of the labour contractor and middleman. The government should gradually take over the function of recruitment and registration of workers on the lines suggested in the Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment, Security and Welfare) Scheme, 1986.
4. Efforts should be directed at the national level on devising tools, equipments, and technology that make the jobs performed by unskilled women workers in construction less hazardous and more energy-saving.
5. Special care should be taken to impart skills like masonry and carpentry to women workers under government initiatives. This is necessary to break the existing taboos against women acquiring special skills in this industry.

Initially, priority in employment may be given to such trained women in government construction sites, the idea being that in a situation of emerging excess demand for such skills, especially in urban markets, there will be no dearth of demand in the market for their skills in due course.

6. There should be a statutory provision for contribution by the contractors to the extent of 10 per cent of net earnings towards a Construction Workers Welfare Fund. The proceeds of this fund should be utilized in building up camping grounds with basic community , medical and health facilities in all cities and townships. These can be used to house the workers. Given such an infrastructure, many of the existing statutes regarding the provision of various facilities to the workers, which are being flagrantly violated now, will be automatically taken care of. Voluntary institutions like the Mobile Creches may be adequately supported in terms of infrastructure and finance to enable them to extend their operations over a number of cities and townships, so that a large number of these women and children can be reached and a measure of stability is imparted to their home situation.

Finally, the value of community awareness and organisation for the poor cannot be over emphasised. To start with, the government can help in the process by providing assistance on worksites, for nonformal education, legal literacy, health care and childcare, and encouragement for the formation of various community groups and workers' organisations and support to NGOs to extend their operations among construction workers in general and women workers in particular.

**Industrialisation:** As far as industrial policy and programmes are connected the encouragement given to the small sector has led to splitting of large units in small ones, contracting and subcontracting by large units, and the growth of home-based industries. These forms of production are used as means of avoiding labour laws and exploiting workers. In this situation of exploitation, women have suffered more. The employment of women in the traditional household sector has been affected by severe competition from mass-produced consumer goods. Household industries face a serious problem of markets, raw materials and credit. Women are dominant in the contract system as piece-rate workers. They work for long hours without the benefits of leave, holidays and permanency of work, and get very low wages. Women labour in factories are also subject to casualization, contractualization and temporary employment. Although women have been legally guaranteed maternity benefits, equal remuneration, and childcare facilities, in reality they are deprived of them. Industrialization has not resulted in any significant occupational diversification of the female labour force. Women dominate in low-skill work areas and their role in management and decision making is very limited. The Commission recommends:

1. The formation of an integrated industrial policy for all sectors and regulation of the use of high technology in various industries, because it has been seen

to adversely affect women's employment.

2. Attempts to identify industries in the small scale sector which can help women to become self-employed. Industries based on labour-intensive technology should be encouraged.
3. Serious attempts should be made to upgrade the traditional sector and to expand women's employment in the sector by providing adequate support in the areas of technology upgradation, training, credit, raw materials, and marketing. A decentralised approach in providing these facilities will help considerably in the expansion of women's employment in these sectors. It must also be mentioned that the focus here should be on producing goods of mass consumption.

The state Handicrafts Boards do assist artisans to a certain extent by buying their products. But beyond that the Boards have no relationship with the life of the artisans and craftsmen, particularly women. The National Commission finds it important to have a national policy on craftsmen to be framed, ensuring a fair return for their work and self-respecting conditions of work and living.

Realising the urgent need of social security for craftswomen the Commission recommends that:

1. As their homes are their workplaces, proper housing and workshops should be provided, specially to women, as craftspersons are all home-based. Housing also adds to the security of women's lives.
2. General Insurance Companies should be roped in, to devise suitable insurance against critical days of maternity, incapability, illness, and old age.
3. For award winners, introduction of monthly income schemes under the Unit Trust may be explored.
4. A central fund may be created for medical care of the ailing artisans and craftsmen/women.

The following specific steps may be taken

- i. Micro-level data collection regarding various aspects of 'Handicrafts'
- ii. Government's support to help units in the initial stages
- iii. Treatment of handicrafts and rural artisan work as industry
- iv. Creating mass scale marketing for handicrafts, and,
- v. State level policies for state specific crafts.

The country earns annual foreign exchange close to Rs.1000 crores from handicrafts, handloom, and readymade garments sector where women contribute to a very large extent. The Commission is of the view that there is ample scope and justification for investment in providing social security and welfare scheme for women artisans and craftsmen/women of our country.

To take the benefit of the various promotional schemes of the Government, they face major problems with inadequate, untimely and irregular supply of working funds from the Cooperative Banks which are more attuned to the needs of agricultural sector; the subsidies for loans and rebate are not released in time and in sequence, resulting in unsmooth running of the cooperative; nonrecognition of women's pre-weaving and post-weaving work as 'work', hence they are ignored by the present cooperatives, and government development and welfare programmes.

The Commission therefore recommends:

1. The District Industries Centres and District Cooperative Banks jointly prepare a 'business plan' for each handloom cooperative, in consultation with the members, women's included.
2. The district Industries Centres should accordingly submit demands for the necessary funds from the Government banks, and Nabard well in time.
3. To adopt region-specific measures viz. establishing of spinning capacity in the region, technological upgradation of looms, transport subsidy and linkages with outside markets.

The industry, at present, is facing a number of problems in the areas of technology, raw materials, and marketing organization. In addition to removing these constraints, there is a need to take the following specific steps to help women workers:

1. Sensitisation of the concerned staff to take care of women's needs.
2. Promotional projects and schemes to indicate increase in income and employment of women.
3. Training of women in weaving.
4. Improved technologies for the tasks handled by women.
5. Facilities like creches and maternity benefits to support their employment.
6. All the women who do pre-weaving in the households should be immediately enrolled as members of the cooperatives to cover them under economic and welfare schemes, and,

## 7. Formation of women weavers' cooperatives.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is an important instrument to reduce rural poverty and promote women's development. However certain drastic changes are required in the approach structuring and management of the KVIC.

1. At present, the women are involved in activities like making aggarabattis and papad rolling which are comparatively less paid than activities in which men are involved. KVIC should correct this distortion and promote women taking up trades bringing in higher income like handmade paper and weaving.
2. KVIC should provide support services like childcare, elementary education, health and family planning. It should generate employment through organization of actual producers or workers, and it should raise awareness among women about their rights and responsibilities to enhance their general participation in all fields of national development. KVIC and KVIB programmes should be directed to poor women belonging to low castes, including the SC/ST. KVIC should also involve women in supervision and management so that women workers do not remain only in subordinate positions.

As far as small industry sector is concerned, attempts should be made to strengthen it economically and steps should be taken to protect women workers of this sector from various types of exploitation:

1. Labour laws should be enacted to cover contract and sub-contract workers, homebased workers and seasonal workers.
2. Appropriate laws should be formulated to protect homebased workers from different types of exploitation.
3. Strict observation of labour laws should be insisted in the small factory sector, including seasonal factories.
4. The laws regarding permanency should be strictly enforced in this sector. To start with all public sector units should provide permanency of employment to their workers.

The licensing policy has remained gender neutral, thereby not paying much attention to the male/female division of labour in the economy and the specific requirements of female workers. It has, therefore, created an adverse effect on women's employment.

The licensing policy, like the industrial policy, needs to be examined from the point of view of employment generation for the masses of the poor, including women; it should also consciously incorporate the gender factor so that large scale erosion of employment opportunities for women is prevented.



**Credit, raw material and marketing:** Whenever large industries sub-contract work to women, who do it in their own houses, it is necessary that the employer does not evade his legal obligations to provide the benefits which would have accrued, had the women worked in his establishment such as provision of water, space, electricity or other means of lighting. Women should be encouraged to work in common sheds to improve their work status and build up solidarity.

There are certain common problems faced by women in the self-employed and informal sector like lack of access to raw material, credit and marketing facilities and inadequate knowledge of the market demands. All too often, the end product does not have the finishing touch and the eye for detail is missing. Women are further handicapped by lack of childcare facilities, inadequate work place with poor ventilation and lighting facilities, poor skills, and lack of training. They tend to get exploited by the middlemen and have to pay exorbitant rates of interest on the small loans that they manage to get. In such a situation, women doing their own account work get gradually weeded out and become casual labour or piece-rate workers.

**A. Credit:** One of the most critical components of women's advancement in the economic field is the availability of credit. In the present system, women do not have access to easy credit even if the amount is very small. In spite of the Reserve Bank's instructions that no security is required for loans upto Rs.5,000/-, collateral is generally asked for in the case of women. An analysis of the existing mainline credit schemes for the poor show that not only are poor women marginalised, but the poor as a class do not have easy access to credit. Instead, politicisation of these loans has managed to give the poor a bad name as defaulters.

Women are marginalised either because of class handicaps such as illiteracy, lack of information and low self-confidence, or gender handicaps, such as attitudinal discrimination, low mobility and lack of asset ownership. The money-lender is a very real part of their lives as a source for both consumption and production credit. They have a complex financial arrangement with him. Banks are still very much a taboo, IRDP, DRI and SEPUP do not even average a 20 per cent coverage of women loanees. In effect, the banks have remained totally off-limits. The only instances where the banks have been successfully tapped is when voluntary agencies such as Annapurna Mahila Mandal and Working Women's Forum have acted as intermediaries for women of this class.

The Commission recommends that the banking policy be implemented in favour of women with greater amount of flexibility. It would assist women further if banks have counters exclusively for women and extension workers to help them. Banks managed by women have proved to be more advantageous and within the reach of women. Opening of women's cooperative banks should be promoted.

The Commission is of the opinion that it will be beneficial to women if, apart from giving individual loans, these are advanced to or through agencies with which

women have dealings like Mahila Mandals, women's groups, Anganwadi workers, State Advisory Boards and Women's Development Corporations. These bodies can also be channelized for getting the paperwork completed. The entire loan should be given in the name of the individuals through bank pass books. These loans could be advanced from the banks according to the existing procedures.

The quantum of loans given to women should be assessed realistically keeping their needs in view. Giving loans of a lesser amount is self-defeating. The Commission, therefore, recommends that an inflexible blanket ceiling for loans for the poor should not be made and there should be a component of subsidy within each loan.

The Commission would like to mention that vendors normally want very small loans per day or per week to buy food, vegetables and other perishable items. For such loans it is not possible for them to go to the banks. The Government should, therefore, devise suitable channels through which such loans to petty vendors can be disbursed. Women's banks, Cooperative banks and voluntary agencies, having experience in this field, may be used as channels for disbursement. Other channels should be identified, keeping in view the state variations relating to the existing infrastructures.

The Commission has noticed that if the husband has been a defaulter, the woman is disqualified from getting loans. This needs to be reviewed as, in many cases the default by the husband may be due to factors like non-viability of the project and inadequate amount of loans. In some cases, husbands may be genuine defaulters, misusing the amount, thereby pushing the family into greater distress. For this very reason, the women may want to take loans. If it is seen that the woman is not being used as a screen for a further loan by the husband it would not be proper to deny the wife a loan because the husband is a defaulter.

The Commission has also observed that when a person takes a loan for the first time, he or she may already be in debt and such loans taken are used for wiping out the existing debts, which may be amounts due to the money lender, rather than starting a new venture. The Commission strongly recommends that the economic status of a loanee should be taken into account and the amount sanctioned should be such that a portion of it may be used for wiping out the debt as only then can economic ventures be started. A realistic and human approach by the banking, financial and other institutions will help the most impoverished women.

The National Commission recommends innovations in the credit mechanism to assist poor women who are unfamiliar with the complexities of institutional finance. The Commission strongly recommends the need for setting up an exclusive credit body for poor and self-employed women, in recognition of their socio-economic realities. It is also a recognition of the inability of the existing institutionalised credit systems to cater to the needs of women workers.

Organisations such as SEWA (Ahmedabad), WWF (Madras), Samakhya (Hyderabad), and Annapurna Mahila Mandal (Bombay), have designed scientific credit experiments for poor women in rural and urban areas.

Since the voluntary sector has unequivocally proved its activeness in delivering credit to this target sector the proposed national credit body must aim to support such organisations. Rather than take on a bureaucratic size and a cumbersome operation of opening loan windows over the country, this body can support the voluntary organisations which can further loan to the target sector.

The proposed credit body can, through loans and grants, improve the equity base of the voluntary organisations providing loans to them on soft terms basis. It can also be instrumental in initiating many more voluntary experiments all over the country. This would require a research and development cell in the body which can study all existing experiments and build a model for replication. Trainers can then help more organisations to adopt these credit schemes for which the seed capital and loan can come from the credit body. This body can also support government credit bodies such as the Women's Development and Finance Corporation. It can also act as an important forum for dialogue between the organised credit institutions and the voluntary agencies. Since it will be the most comprehensive credit effort for women of this class, this body can be a major influence on mainstream credit policies for poor women.

Ownership and management of this institution should represent the voluntary sector largely. Poor women can directly be shareholders of this organisation which can be headed by a trust. Management can be entrusted to professionals while a board of directors oversees the legislative and policy aspects of the institution. Once again the directors must represent a cross-section of persons who have direct experience in this area.

In Madhya Pradesh the State Government has levied a duty of one paise on every unit of electricity consumed, which will help it to raise about Rs. 9 crores annually. This is being used to support a Welfare and Development Fund for Women. More such experiments need to be taken up in the country.

**B. Raw materials:** Raw material is the biggest problem of artisans and craftswomen. The raw material they need is usually in short supply and expensive. They buy the raw material from retailers at high prices and sell the finished goods to common people with low purchasing power. Hence, in spite of having marketable skill, the artisan's own margin of profit remains very low. It is common observation that artisans earn less than vendors or even labourers.

Therefore, the Commission recommends a policy by which the actual producers and artisans should have the first claim to raw materials like yarn, bamboo, scrap, or tendu leaves and a quota should be reserved for them. Where raw

materials are not easily available, alternative channels should be identified through which good quality raw material would be procured at reasonable prices.

**C. Marketing:** The Commission recommends the following agencies which can be used as marketing outlets and can also assist, if necessary, in acquiring credit and raw materials:

1. Consumer Societies, and Consumer Federations.
2. Cooperative Societies, and Cooperative Federations.
3. Super Markets.
4. State Emporia.
5. Setting up of government depots for a cluster of villages which could supply raw materials, if necessary, and collect finished products from women to be supplied to agencies with whom marketing tie-ups have been made.

While the above are actual marketing outlets, other agencies should be identified which can assist the women in identifying markets. These agencies may be the State Advisory Boards, the Women's Development Corporations and voluntary agencies of known experience. In addition, regional marketing centres, having jurisdiction over a few districts, may be set up. At the State level, there should be a Marketing Federation which should have various channels supporting it as mentioned above.

The role of the Divisional Centres and State Federations should be a mix of promotion and active intervention. The guiding principles should be professionalism and flexibility. The persons who will be posted at the centres, to begin with, will have to be hand-picked and well trained. For effective intervention in each area, extension service at the women's doorstep is the most essential component. Therefore, the Commission recommends a well-designed, effective, extension service on the lines of the T & V service in agriculture.

At the state level, an Advisory Committee, having representatives of finance, professional management experts and consultants, representatives of the Government from the administrative department and finance department and representatives from voluntary agencies may be constituted. The Committee should be a standing committee with a fixed term, to be renewed or changed by rotation. This body may lay down broad policy guidelines and also assist the Divisional Centres in getting cooperation from various agencies such as the Government, training institutes, professional institutes, and private marketing agencies. This body will also review the work of the centres and advise if new trades are to be added or certain trades to be dropped; in short, it will decide on the functional role of the Divisional Centres, leaving the Centres with a great deal of flexibility of autonomy.

At the Central level, a similar Advisory Committee, as at the state level, should be set up to assist the Department of Women and Child Development. This

body will review the work of the Divisional Centres, undertake periodic evaluations, decide on the future growth of such Centres, and replicate the models of successful Centres.

The Government itself can provide marketing facilities to women as it makes extensive purchase of goods and services during the course of the year, which could be supplied by women. These purchases could be made from women's groups directly by the state governments, as is being done in Gujarat or through the Women's Development Corporation as is being done in Punjab. In Gujarat, the State Government has also set up a pricing committee to fix prices for goods and services purchased from women. This committee meets periodically to review the prices. Such a support will strengthen the women's cooperatives and other groups.

**Space and transport:** In addition to credit, raw materials and marketing, two additional inputs need to be provided to improve the status of such workers, namely, space and transport facilities. The small producers in the both urban and rural areas normally lack space to serve as workplaces as well. Ventilation and lighting facilities are almost lacking. In the marketplaces vendors do not normally get licences; for want of space they are pushed and harassed by the police and municipal authorities, who, at times, demand bribes in cash or kind. The National Commission recommends that the critical needs of women producers and vendors should be taken into account by the authorities. Common workplaces should be provided, both in the rural and urban areas, having space, ventilation, and water and toilet facilities. This should be assisted under the NREP Programme. In addition, a new allocation should be made.

Similarly for marketing their products, places should be earmarked (e.g. school compounds in the evening) and licences given. In Manipur, there is the women's traditional market, an experiment which is very successful and needs to be widely emulated. In cities, certain areas, certain timings, and days should be earmarked where vehicles should not be allowed; this may give relief to the small vendors by providing market area, thus promoting them instead of treating them as objects of nuisance.

The producers usually carry their products on their heads to the weekly "haats" or from the village to the city. The strain of this work quickly tells on their health. The small amount of goods they produce makes it uneconomical for them to hire transport, so they have to use the public transport system. Usually, they are deprived of access to public buses or trains and have to pay a bribe to use them. In Kerala, women engaged in fisheries have to pay exorbitant hire charges for the taxis as fish is a perishable commodity and there should be no delay in transporting it to their homes or market places. Since they have no access to transportation, they buy fish from the middlemen at a higher price. Similarly, there are other easily perishable commodities like flowers which cannot be retained for too long before they are marketed. The National Commission recommends that attention may be paid to

providing adequate and specially-designed transport facilities for these workers.

**Women in processing industrial occupations --Mining:** In the mining industry, the employment of women has reduced with the banning of women in underground work and night work. However, with the nationalisation of coal mines, there has been a somewhat upward trend in their employment. These workers also face the problems of very low percentage of permanent workers; predominance of women workers as contract workers in unskilled areas; low wages; serious health hazards; bonded labour and flagrant violation of labour laws. The Voluntary Retirement Scheme has been devised solely to reduce the presence of women in mining. It is not devised to reduce the number of manual workers, as it is offered to women only. This practice is in total violation of the right to equality guaranteed under the Constitution.

The Commission, therefore, strongly recommends that:

1. The practice of Voluntary Retirement should be stopped forthwith.
2. In order to prevent the number of women declining in the mining industry, women relatives should have claim on the woman's job on her retirement, and not a male member of the family.
3. Regarding mechanisation in mining, the Commission observes that mechanisation, even if brought in, should be done with proper understanding of financial versus human cost. It is observed that certain processes where mechanisation is brought in, have proved financially more costly, e.g. shale picking in coal mines which is mainly done by women. Therefore, the Commission recommends that such processes should be left to be done manually by women: this will increase their employment opportunities and also cut out the financial costs.
4. The number of women workers as permanent workers should be increased.
5. The interests of women workers in mines should be safeguarded and there should be strict enforcement of labour laws.
6. Skill training should be imparted to women workers so that they could get higher wages.
7. Simple precautionary health saving devices like gloves, helmets, and special shoes should be provided by the employers compulsorily to protect the head, eyes, hands, and feet of women.
8. The Welfare programmes for women workers will get a fillip if increasing numbers of women are appointed as welfare officers.

**Fisherwomen:** The National Commission, on its tours, met a large number of fisherwomen whose conditions are pitiable. Women are traditionally indispensable members of the fishing community, involved in all fishing operations like processing, drying and curing, loading/unloading, and netmaking. The basic problem arises from the perishable nature of fish, poor and costly transport facility which does not allow them to buy fish directly from the fish centres, and competition from modern fishing units. The Commission, therefore, recommends:

1. Protection and regeneration of fish resources.
2. Recognition of their status as workers, and provision of licences.
3. Protective legislation for better wages and working conditions, and social security benefits (the importance of this may be gauged from the fact that while infant mortality for Kerala State is 32 per 1,000, in the coastal belt it is 180 per 1,000).
4. Reversal of high technology, export-oriented trends, that erode their livelihood, without providing alternatives other than marginalisation as highly exploited wage labour.
5. Access to credit facilities.

Similar recommendations will apply to women workers in the garment industry, tobacco processing, food processing, rag pickers, sericulture, silk industry and factory workers. All these workers need to be made visible by the planners. Apart from strict enforcement of legislation, new legislation is also called for. They need to be organised and taken into the fold of trade unions.

As some processing workers may be self-employed, such as garment workers and rag pickers, credit, raw materials and marketing facilities are required. Recommendations on such facilities have been given in the section under Credit, Raw Materials and Marketing.

**Food processing:** Women have traditionally been involved in food processing for family consumption. These skills are, therefore, easily tapped when the need for generation of additional family income is felt. Most often, however, due to the lack of capital and organisational skills, the scale of their business is too small to ensure adequate profits and most women in this industry are not own-account workers, but victims of sub-contracting and putting-out systems. Women labour is clearly preferred as they can be paid very little and are less prone to making demands than men. 40 to 50 per cent of the women do not get regular work, which results in economic hardship and insecurity, further eroding women's ability to demand and fight for improvements. There are some women's organizations in this industry, but it is a pity that most of them are not commercially viable and therefore the benefit to

the women workers is minimal.

The National Commission makes the following recommendations for improvements in the lives of women workers in food industry:

1. Proliferation of sub-contracting must be checked and application of labour laws assured
2. Women should be encouraged to avail of credit facilities to set up production units on their own that are of a size and scale to allow for profits and therefore, steady income for all.

For this, they should be reached by women extension workers from relevant departments and given training, especially in organizational and managerial skills, like marketing and accounting, as well as in leadership and awareness building.

**Forest workers:** The Forestry sector provides employment to 0.2 per cent of the rural population, about 80 per cent of them are estimated to be women and children. They get employment in collection and processing of minor forest produce, and afforestation. Besides employment, the minor forest produce also provides food and income during the lean season to the forest dwellers, mainly tribals. Though officially termed minor, as it earns less revenue, for the forest dwellers the minor forest produce is a major source of income in the months of starvation. About 60 per cent production of minor forest produce is utilised as food. In Orissa, 13 per cent of the forest population depends exclusively on collection of minor produce, 17 per cent as wage labour in forestry; in the Panchmahals, 35 per cent of the total earnings of tribals are from minor forest produce collection. Collection of tendu leaves provides 90 days employment to 75 lakh women every year.

To ensure them better prices produce like tendu leaves, mahua seeds and flowers are nationalized in a number of States. The States have created Forest Development Corporations to remove middlemen and take on the task of procurement and sale of the produce themselves. But the Commission observed that none of the States are engaging themselves in collection, in the real sense of the term. The Forest Development Corporation only fixes the collection rates and asks the purchaser agents to pay that rate to the collectors. There is rampant exploitation by the middlemen by low and delayed payments, rejection of collection, cheating and intimidation. The women remain totally at the mercy of the middlemen. The Forest officials are hardly in support of the collectors. The Commission, therefore, recommends that:

1. The forest produce collectors should be paid the rates in such a way that they do earn at least not less than the NREP rate, at the end of the day.
2. Serious efforts should be made by the Forest authorities to help these



women form their own cooperatives to collect and sell the produce to the Forest Development Corporations.

3. The women of the cooperative should be trained in processing of the various minor forest produce.
4. A scheme should be developed to supply additional foodgrains in the months of unemployment during the year.

**Garment workers:** The readymade garment industry is a highly profitable one for the manufacturer and trader or contractor, given that demand is high and labour available is submissive and cheap. The trader buys fents, rags and substandard materials from mills and wholesalers; this is cut by cutters, who may work on the traders' premises, then distributed to tailors, mostly women, who work in their own homes. Where production is modernized and fashions set up with the latest technology, men workers have a monopoly. Moreover, it is difficult to find a single woman cutter.

Tailor women collect the cloth from the traders, stitch the material and return the finished garments and collect the next batch of material. This is a regular process. It is the women who have to bear the entire cost of space, transportation, maintenance of their sewing machines, and thread. Wages may be paid weekly or monthly and flimsy, temporary records are kept. Piece-rate wages are arbitrarily fixed. Since these workers are scattered and unorganized, they are paid very little with no fear of protest. In fact, considering that they work at home and establishment costs are borne by them, their wages should be higher and not lower than the wages of those who work in large garment factories.

As such the existing labour laws do not apply to them as they are not workers and even if applied, the laws are violated. The workers have no protection, no rights, no recognition and no powers.

In the light of this situation, the National Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. In areas where this industry is concentrated Training Centres should be set up in order to help women upgrade their skills, as well as to give them information about their rights and the schemes that they can benefit from in order to go into business on their own or as a group, such as a cooperative.
2. In order to reach the maximum number of women and help them in the most meaningful way, a large number of extension workers is necessary, who should be trained to impart the information that is relevant to these workers, to help them avail of schemes and services, and to press for legal redress.

3. These workers are especially vulnerable to health problems related to eyesight, poor ventilation, and bad posture. These need to be taken into account while planning any ameliorative measures for them.

**Vendors/Hawkers:** Vendors and hawkers perform a vital function in the commodity distribution system of towns and cities, yet they are regarded as anti-developmental and anti-social. City planners are biased in favour of the formal sector, and prefer to provide for expensive super-markets and shops rather than help vendors who only require a small space for squatting with their wares, and transportation facilities from the wholesale markets to their vending sites.

It appears that the unorganised sector is expanding and urban poverty is to stay for many years to come. Vendors, with their small capital needs should therefore be encouraged and supported, and informal and formal sectors allowed to complement each other. While it is a fact that there are associated problems of congestion and hygiene, the solution cannot be to ban them, dislocate them or fine and harass them, especially because most hawkers belong to the low income population, and 40 per cent of them are women, of whom 30 to 40 per cent are estimated (by some micro studies) to be the sole supporters of their families. Thus measures to help hawkers should be part of the broader structural policies designed to improve the standards of living and welfare of the low income population in the city.

Therefore the National Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. The service performed by vendors should be recognized and the authorities should liberally issue licences to women vendors especially, considering their greater need and major contribution. The licence should carry a photograph of the vendor and therefore serve as an identity card as well.
2. There is a need for an integrated authority to be set up whose primary responsibility would be to co-ordinate and increase the effectiveness of commodity distribution systems in towns and cities. This body should have provision for adequate consultation between the representatives of the distribution trade and the officials.
3. Urban planners should recognise the space requirements of vendors and hawkers. A space for a women's market, such as the traditional women's market in Manipur, should be an integral part of the plans for all newly developing areas.
4. Every market complex must have provision for squatting vendors and all related facilities like drinking water, washing, toilet, storage, and creches should be provided. Market Committees should be formed to manage these facilities on which women vendors should be given due representation; furthermore, the vendors should organise to form their own Association.

Where street foods are sold, supply of water taps and garbage disposal should be taken care of by this Association.

5. A mechanism should be evolved for creating a fund which would assist vendors in their cash requirements for expanding their business to viable proportions. With comparatively less investment there are some gains and consequent improvements in the lives of the workers. The fine collected should be utilised for their welfare. Supportive services and social security schemes may be planned and set up.
6. Regular training courses should be organised for vendors at the market-place itself, on sanitation and health, fair business practices, and schemes of assistance and how to avail of them.
7. All existing legislation and municipal rules should be amended according to the above points and new legislation enacted wherever necessary.

**Domestic workers:** Domestic workers are in the lowest rung of the ladder in the urban economy. The division of labour between the sexes and its pattern of task allocation, has rendered domestic service a predominantly female occupation. The tasks performed by domestic workers are practically the same ones performed as unpaid work within the family such as cleaning, washing, ironing, and taking care of children. There are 1.06 million domestic workers according to the 1971 Census, out of whom more than 4 lakhs are women. This is one of the most vulnerable groups of workers since there is neither government regulation to cover this section of the labour force, nor is there any written contract for the work, so they are hired and fired at the will of the employer.

In the absence of any formal contract, their working condition is often oppressive and the employer can always evade his responsibility. The traditional trade unions have also not taken any interest in organizing them till recently. The problems faced by them include deplorable wages, insecure service, no holidays or leave, no maternity or medical benefits, and health problems.

The Commission recommends the following steps to improve the condition of domestic workers:

1. A system of registration for domestic workers should be introduced. Besides giving them visibility and taking account of the workers and their contribution, this registration body could also perform the role of looking into the problems and grievances of these workers. It could also, from time to time, assess the local situation and fix wages/rates for the domestic workers. This body may be composed of the representatives of the state, the domestic workers, and employers, as a tripartite body.

2. Fixing a minimum wage is extremely important in view of the prevalent exploitative trends. Wage fixation would need to take into account the hours of work, the spread over of work, the number of jobs to be performed, and the number of persons in the family, since that would determine the workload of the domestic workers. The rate fixed, however, should in no case be less than the prescribed minimum wage.
3. Legislation: There is a need for a legislation to regulate the conditions of employment, social security and security of employment. This lack of security in the job restricts the domestic workers' bargaining power and ability to demand basic facilities like paid leave. A number of women's groups working with domestic workers have proposed 'The Domestic Workers (Conditions of Service) Bill' to regulate working hours, holidays and leave, letter of appointment, application of certain existing laws like the minimum wages to domestic workers, which the Commission endorses.
4. For the enforcement of the policy and legislation mentioned, it is essential that this vulnerable group be organised. They may be organized for economic benefits, support services like education and childcare, training, and better tools and equipments.
5. There is also need for all these organising efforts to culminate into a stronger movement. For this, there should be a federation of domestic workers where all the small groups working with domestic workers come together and build collective strength. Government can also take a very positive and supportive role in this by organising workshops of these groups and providing them support and knowhow.
6. The problems of domestic workers are linked to the problems of lack of alternatives and distress immigration from rural areas. Hence the dependence of these migrant women on their employers (even for shelter) is very high which makes them weak when it comes to bargaining for their rights. In such a situation, the provision of low cost hostels for such girls/women would help reduce their dependence and vulnerability.
7. There have been successful attempts of agencies in training girls to be domestic help who also look after their employment and settle their wages. Girls collect once a week at the agencies where they are provided training, and literacy, and these agencies provide shelter and find alternative placement for girls thrown out by the employer. The Government should help and promote such agencies by assisting them financially.

**Anti-poverty programmes:** Anti-poverty programmes were designed to directly benefit those below the poverty line as development benefits were not accruing to the poor. The experiences with anti-poverty programmes have shown that there is

a need to improve their policy, programme design and implementation.

At the policy level, there is a need to accept that women's needs are not only for self-employment. In fact, poor women can be divided into three categories on the basis of their needs:

1. Destitutes, disabled and handicapped women who want social assistance rather than income/employment-generating programmes
2. Women (mainly belonging to the poorer sections) who are neither willing nor capable of taking up self-employment programmes and who want wage employment
3. Women who have skill/education/literacy/enterprise to take up self-employment programmes

The programmes should be designed on the basis of the needs of women at the micro level.

The Commission recommends that the self-employment programmes should be strengthened on the following lines:

1. Planning for self-employment for women needs a multipronged strategy. Apart from the measures to support self-employment as such, the planning should also incorporate technology to reduce drudgery of women, organisation of women, childcare and child development, and overall development of women.
2. In order to improve the access of women to self-employment, it is necessary to evolve a judicious combination of the household approach and the individual approach. Women should be treated as independent entities in the labour market and attempts should be made to provide equal access to self-employment to both men and women.
3. It is also necessary to give joint titles to women to improve their access to the credit market. The present approach of giving them joint ownership of land only in the event of transfer of land is not enough. The joint ownership should be extended to all the types of productive assets and to the present status of ownership also.
4. Appropriate extension strategy should be adopted to attack the specific socio-psychological constraints of women. If necessary, female extension officers/staff should be appointed.
5. The designing of self-employment programmes (specially of DWCRA) for

women should have an explicit planning component in the sense that each aspect of planning-training, marketing, management, should get enough attention. Group approach will be useful in this context.

6. Special attention will have to be paid to the needs of female-headed families. This could be done by giving them preferential treatment in self-or wage-employment programmes. Destitutes of these families should also be provided social assistance on a preferential basis through social security measures.
7. It is necessary to pay adequate attention to the support programmes like maternity benefits, creche, and technology for removing drudgery of women. It is important that these programmes are undertaken at a level that creates an impact and meet the needs of women. In this context, it is important to mention the urgency of the programmes pertaining to drinking water, energy and environment, as all the three are likely to reduce women's drudgery considerably.
8. Organisation of women for creating awareness, for production activities, as well as for creating solidarity among women, will contribute considerably to eradication of women's poverty. Reformulation of the Mahila Mandal Scheme, and encouragement to women's cooperatives, will be useful in this context.
9. DWCRA could be improved by detailing of guidelines for the programmes; strengthening the training component of skill, entrepreneurship, and management; supporting it in the areas of raw materials and marketing; and introducing continuous sympathetic evaluation of the programme.
10. Agencies like Mahila Mandals, voluntary agencies and cooperatives should be utilised for assisting women in completing formalities for getting credit.

In the areas of wage employment programmes, the following steps are recommended:

1. It is necessary to increase the size of this programme considerably. Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra has shown that poor women do participate in these programmes in large numbers.
2. There is a need to strengthen the planning component of these programmes so as to ensure continuous work to women workers on productive assets which are selected carefully keeping in mind the needs of the region.
3. Planning and designing of these programmes should be done keeping in mind the specific needs and preferences of poor women.

4. Arrangements such as drinking water and creches, and worksheds should be provided on work sites.
5. Regular payment of wages at the stipulated rates should be insisted upon. Better supervision by authorities can contribute substantially in this area.

The Commission is of the view that in order to diversify women's activities, it is necessary to impart them training to improve their skills. In the existing farmers' training programmes, participation of women is very low. In TRYSEM, although the participation of women is reported to have achieved a target of 30 per cent, training has not been imparted in the areas in which women work, or in the allied areas. The emphasis of training has been knitting, sewing, embroidery and possibly animal husbandry. This has not led to increase in the employment of women or enhanced their remuneration. All training programmes must be linked to employment with the objective of increasing the remuneration and improving their living conditions.

There is a need to sensitise the government functionaries at the District and Block levels to the realities of women's work. For example, the Commission observed on its tours, that most government functionaries are unaware of the large numbers of women who are heads of households or who bring in more than half of the total family income, because of a mistaken belief, based on middle class cultural norms, that all women are attached to households and cared for by some male member.

It is also true that for those below poverty line, poverty means half starvation. Among the hungry, women are hungrier. It has been very often observed that the credit facility given to them is used in buying foodgrains for the family. The half starved and malnourished women can hardly be expected to have the psychological strength and mental will to participate in the development schemes meant for them.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that ways should be explored whereby additional foodgrains can be provided as subsidy for those who have a loan burden to discharge under the IRDP; in such cases there would be more likelihood of the credit being used entirely for productive purpose.

The Commission also recommends that the foodgrains supplied at subsidised rate to the private sector should be stopped and diverted to the rural poor.

The Commission recommends that a programme should be built up linking wage employment, development activities and the public distribution system, for women especially the vulnerable groups like tribals, forest workers, and IRDP loan beneficiaries. A wage programme through the public distribution system can be designed for poor women. Supply of foodgrains serves as an insulation against price rise in the open market, particularly during the lean period of the year.

For women, food means better productivity and better motherhood.

**Drought Relief Work:** Unfortunately, drought has become a regular feature in our country causing severe distress to poor women workers who are pushed further into the areas of underemployment and unemployment. Famine work should not be seen as a charity to the poor but as a basic human right for those who need work. The Commission, therefore, recommends:

1. As per the Minimum Wages Act and judgement of the Supreme Court and the guidelines laid down by various High Courts, all relief works must pay minimum wages. Any notification of any State Government to exclude famine relief work from the jurisdiction of Minimum Wages Act should be treated as illegal and unconstitutional.
2. Effective maintenance of muster rolls and wage slips should be ensured. Where women are working their own name should be extended in the muster roll and not their men's name; the cash payment also should go actually in the women's hands.

As it is observed that more than 50 per cent labour is female labour on Relief Worksites, the rule of law to provide creches, shed and drinking water should be strictly observed.

3. Famine relief work should include a variety of activities which help build future capital assets, and human capital in and around the villages where people live. The assets created should be those having priority for women like worksheds, creches and toilets. There should be decentralization in formulation of projects and diversification in the nature of activities which may include activities like improving the quality of land, water resources, digging or deepening of wells, and bunding. For this, local level planning will have to be ensured. National or State level blue prints cannot be implemented at local levels. In this context, involvement of local women and men, women's representatives, Mahila Mandals, Voluntary Organizations, and Unions must be considered.

### **Urbanisation and the informal sector**

Cities have developed in India as commercial or trade centres or as administrative headquarters. They have been dominated by an urban elite class for whom they are designed and developed. Many of these elite belong to the formal sector. On the other hand, poverty in rural India has led to the migration of poor to urban centres for employment, where, they have no access to space and land, either for shelter or for pursuing their occupation, nor do they have access to the formal sector for employment. Thus the dominance of the elite and the formal sector has marginalised a whole group of people in the city. These disadvantaged people solve



their problem by hawking on the streets, squatting in public places, by making 'unauthorised colonies' and 'unplanned' settlements.

There is a strong case for our reconsidering the priorities and recognising the needs of the informal sector who contribute substantially to the income and services to the formal sector. Understanding of space itself, leads to many planning problems. The following points may provide a direction as to how to incorporate urban informal sector in urban planning.

1. Recognize the urban informal sector as an integral part of urban planning. All the Master Plans or Development Plans must have a special component in the plans and policies formulated to include the urban informal sector in planning.
2. Make land-use plans to achieve maximum integration and complementarity of informal and formal sector. New and liberal location policies must be adopted.
3. Change or modification of the existing land-use and land tenure policies so that variation in the use of urban space during the different days of the week and during the day and the night becomes possible.
4. Recognize and support the services of the urban informal sector, such that their conflict with the formal sector can be resolved. Providing dumping yards for the waste-picker, segregated traffic lanes for pedal rickshaws, working yards for the home based producers are some examples.
5. Work places for women producers and workers, doing their own account work, with facilities for lighting and ventilation, drinking water, toilets and creches need to be provided. In addition, space for small depots need to be provided near places of work such as commercial centers and strategic points of communications, where milk, vegetables, fruits, and provisions are available to reduce the workload of women whose responsibility it normally is to make such purchases after working hours.
6. Housing facilities for working women, especially for single women or women-headed households, need to be planned. Similarly, the housing facilities for homebased workers should include adequate space provision for carrying out their work.
7. It is recommended that wherever possible separate transport facilities for women may be provided to women workers to and from their place of work so that they do not face any harassment from male passengers. Provision for transport of their goods should be made in such vehicles.

8. Encourage studies in the field of urban planning, that help evolve planning process and techniques, which can ensure that the urban informal sector is not by-passed in planning. Special attention in the studies should be given to women workers in the informal sector.

## **Technology**

Technology has treated women workers unfairly. A number of studies have documented that improvements in technology, in an industry have displaced women. There are, therefore, some short-run measures which are recommended to protect women from this displacement:

1. Directives should be issued to all industrial units, specially in the public sector, that no further reduction in the level of employment of women will be permitted
2. A small planning group should be set up by the Technology Policy Cell to design a format, listing the criteria for evaluation of all proposals of technology transfer and automation in industries with special reference to women's opportunities for employment
3. Schemes should be formulated for retraining women released from sick industries or closed industrial units

There is also a need to develop a long term perspective on technology for women. This could be done on the following lines:

1. The Ministry of Labour should prepare a list of those sectors/industries which are presently labour-intensive and provide employment to sizeable numbers of women who are likely to be affected by technology transfer jeopardising their employment opportunities. In such cases, the pace and degree of mechanisation should be so regulated and phased out that women are trained on the job and be given inputs like credit and tools.
2. Projects which result in the displacement of women should not be issued business licenses and/or funded or given concessions of subsidies by the Government, Banks and Corporations, unless the displaced women can be firmly rehabilitated in alternative employment. The displaced women should have the first priority in training for new jobs created by the new technology.
3. The Project Appraisal Division of the Planning Commission in collaboration with the Technology Policy Implementation Committee, should formulate clear guidelines for the approval of import of technology or automation in any given industry, by listing the issues critical in technology assessment and valuation.

4. The Inter-Departmental Working Group set up by the Technology Policy Implementation Committee to draw up guidelines for technology assessment and evaluation, and absorption of imported technology, has made a large number of recommendations (1985) which need to be implemented.
5. It should be incumbent on the employers to prepare a good feasibility report while submitting their proposal for a loan for technology transfer to the government to indicate existing capital-labour ratio and changes expected after introduction of technology, present pattern of employment (sexwise) within the industry at the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled levels, and the demand for different categories of labour after technology transfer.
6. All technologies which are likely to directly and indirectly increase women's workloads must be accompanied by other technologies or measures to ease or eliminate these side effects; in other words, a systems approach should be used to develop packages, rather than the current uni-dimensional approach. These multi-faceted packages must be gender-sensitive and women biased.
7. The development of new technologies for traditional, or even modern occupations, must be prioritised, beginning with women's occupations.
8. Development of simple or appropriate technology in the form of tools, implements and protective devices, to remove or reduce the work-related hazards faced by women, must be given top priority and taken up on a war-footing. Mechanisms must be created for involving the women themselves in this process.
9. An advisory committee, with some power of veto, must be set up at central government level to monitor the impact of technology on women. The Committee should also actively identify and promote the areas for research and development of pro-women technologies.
10. Existing technologies which are not appropriate to women, though they are almost exclusively utilised by women (e.g. sewing machines, handcarts, table heights, cashew-nut sifters) should be redesigned on a priority basis. The redesigning should be based on anthropometric measurements of Indian women.
11. Thirty-five per cent of all the research and development funds of national research and design institutes should be reserved for women's work, including occupational health studies, and working out changes in these for the convenience of women workers.
12. An important requirement in this context is to introduce an inbuilt system of

evaluation. A multi-disciplinary group for technology evaluation may be set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour drawing expertise of several organisations within the government.

## **Health**

Most of the health problems that women face are related to their general life situation. These aggravate the problems women face in their work situation as workers. These problems include nutrition, accessibility to health services, water, housing, sanitation, maternity benefits, childcare, control over their welfare, opportunities for education and training, their status within the family, as well as situations that affect their mental and emotional health, that is economic and job insecurity and helplessness due to harassment and discrimination.

Health is no longer seen as an isolated service. A package of health services for women in the informal sector will not be adequate without, at the same time, affecting their levels of living, including a living wage, improved conditions of work, a safe and hazard free work place as well as protective equipment, controlled hours of work, benefits such as for health, maternity, creches and old-age pensions, housing and potable water near to their home in quantities necessary for family health. Health must be understood in the context of this total scenario to affect the conditions of women in the informal sector.

The National Commission makes the following suggestions with regard to women, health and work.

1. Nutritious and sufficient food is a crying need of the women workers in the informal sector. Specific nutritional programmes which include calcium, proteins, iron and Vitamin D, could be initiated through the government health care system. A nation-wide programme for the distribution of nutritious, subsidised food supplements which includes calcium for women should be organised, on the lines of a similar programme for distribution of milk and egg powder in the 1950s. Coarse grains like ragi as well as milk must be made widely available at subsidised rates.

2. Mental health is an important element in the general well-being of women workers in the informal sector. Physical insecurity and the anxiety due to it, often lead to physical ill-health. Besides, a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability affect women workers still further. Hence, it is necessary that:

- a. There should be stringent punishments for rape and all forms of sexual harassment. The government should legislate a Prevention of Violence Against Women Act to cover harassment at work-sites, homes, streets, police stations, and prisons.

Work site harassment should also be included in labour laws and in the Industrial Disputes Act, with the burden of proof being on the man.

- b. There is also the need for a Prevention of Domestic Violence Act to cover, specifically, wife-beating, child-battering, molestation, marital violence and domestic rape and mental cruelty.
  - c. The Law of Evidence must be changed, in view of the fact that many of the most serious crimes against women, such as rape, dowry harassment, marital violence and sexual assault are committed in situations without witnesses.
  - d. There is a need for facilities for psychotherapy and the rehabilitation of victims of harassment, rape and exploitation. Sending them to a shelter is not adequate to overcome their shock, anger and shame. They need a trained staff who understand their needs and reactions and facilities for medical care and psychotherapy.
3. Availability of and accessibility to health care facilities.
- a. Increasing the availability of the accessibility to health care facilities is important in order that the recent positive advances against diseases reach the mass of poor women. Statistics on health facilities and their use indicate that women go to hospital and contact medical functionaries less often than men. Studies also indicate that the amount of money spent by households for medical treatment is greater for men and boys than for women and girls. The result is higher morbidity and mortality among women, including a very high maternal mortality rate. The rates of maternal death, lack of accessibility for the care of pregnant mothers, deliveries conducted by trained attendants, coverage of women with immunisation against tetanus, are all well known, and do not need to be reported. The need for trained "dais", accessible primary health centres and sub-centres, and their linkages to referral and district hospitals is also known and has bearing on the health needs of the general population as much as on working women.
  - b. It is also important to state that a large proportion of the users of the service mentioned under (a) are women in poverty, all of whom are workers. There should therefore be Refresher/Orientation courses for the doctors on the subject of women's work and health hazards especially in the informal sector. These should be a part of the regular courses in the curriculum.

A few visits to Preventive and Social Medicine Departments by the Task Force and by the National Commission also brought to the fore this neglected area which must be studied by medical personnel, social scientists and professional social workers.

- c. While ensuring better choices for women, including women's access to safe deliveries and safe and free abortion, it is necessary to stress the immediate

abolition of the oppression that comes directly from the Government pressure on women both as promoters (ANMS, teachers, nurses) and as receptors of family planning methods like injectable contraceptive and amniocentesis. In fact, the entire emphasis of 'Family Planning', to the exclusion of other health care facilities, needs to be strongly opposed, not only because it is oppressive, in itself, and has caused misery to millions of poor women in the country, but also because it discredits the public health system and makes poor women workers dependent upon private, exploitative medical facilities.

4. Certain concrete steps need to be immediately taken to facilitate the reaching of health-care to the poor, labouring women.

- a. The timings of the dispensaries and hospitals should be fixed in a way which would be convenient to working women.
- b. Necessary medicines should be adequately stocked and the hospitals and PHCs should be operated in such a way as to keep the number of visits of the women to the minimum necessary, if they are to avail of the treatment, otherwise, they get discouraged and do not continue.
- c. There should be a 24 hours creche facility for women patients with children in every hospital and PHC.
- d. Women should be allowed two free bus-rides to the nearest Primary Health Centre every month.
- e. Because they are already poorly nourished, illness complicates this condition further. As food is a significant component for effective recovery hospital should provide free food to poor women most of whom are daily wage, casual and piece-rate earners whose income ceases on hospitalisation.
- f. Dais, who are the only source of help for the majority of women, should be taken seriously, as a vital source of rural health care. Their skills should be enhanced via on-going training and their regular involvement in public health work should be encouraged.
- g. The Commission recommends that the community may be motivated to construct and maintain one clean and sterilized room in the village to be used for conducting deliveries by trained dais.
- h. Women should be involved at the village level as community health guides if women's access to health care is to be improved. Teams comprising of one literate, and one experienced though not necessarily literate older woman, may be the most desirable, both in term of outreach and accessibility to women.

**Occupation-related recommendations:** Preventive health education, both with respect to occupational and other health problems (anaemia, leucorrhea etc.), should be initiated through the Workers' Education Board.

Electricity should be made available on a priority basis to workers, particularly those whose trade adversely affects their eyesight, and to all other home-based women workers at non-industrial/non-commercial rates.

A comprehensive Health and Safety Act should be evolved and enacted. This Act should give the workers the:

1. right to information about chemicals and work processes at the work site
2. right to inspect work sites
3. right to demand guards for machinery, monitoring and controlling levels of dust, fumes and fibres in the work atmosphere
4. right to demand personal protective equipment
5. right to stop work if the conditions are found unsafe
6. right to redress, compensation, etc. for damages

This Act should be evolved in consultation with workers' trade unions and concerned voluntary agencies.

7. Maternity benefits, creches, old age benefits and pensions are mentioned elsewhere in the recommendations.
8. There is a need for a humane Drug Policy and check on the Pharmaceutical industry that at present operates on the profit principle like any other industry, even up to hoarding life-saving drugs to hike prices. The National Commission recommends the promotion of low cost medicines on the lines of the policy on minimum essential drugs of Bangladesh.

Special emphasis must be placed on the ergonomic aspect of women's work, including postural problems. Innovation in the production processes which could reduce health problems should be examined, with workers guiding and advising throughout, and such innovations be recognised and rewarded. Legislative protection and removal of restrictive legislation, need to be provided for voluntary agencies to play an effective role.

With respect to technology, the Commission recommends as follows:

1. In the specific area of health technology -- particularly contraceptives and sex-determination techniques -- strong and immediate steps must be taken to withdraw or ban such technologies where they are actually damaging the health of already vulnerable poor women. Measures for women's education and health promotion must be strengthened.
2. Multi-centred studies of health problems of women workers in specific occupational groups should be undertaken by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on a priority basis. These studies should cover:
  - a. the occupation related problems -- direct and indirect
  - b. the general health problems of women workers
  - c. the effects of the triple burden on women.
3. National Institutes like the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research), and ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) should give a priority to research on health problems of the unorganised labouring women. It is a pity that a leading institute like the ICMR does not even have women's cell to look into the health problems of half the country's population. However, the present tendency of confining research related to women to a small cell is also questionable as it results in marginalisation. Ideally, while the entire institute, say, the ICMR or the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) should focus on workers, both women and men, the women's cell should try to take up issues related more specifically to women.
4. The ICMR, NIOH, National Institute of Design (NID) and such other organisations should undertake occupational health studies of women's work. These should be done with a view to developing simple preventive and protective mechanisms and machines acceptable to workers, which would reduce their health problems.

## **Education**

Education is both an important instrument for increasing and bettering the chances of women's employability and for empowering women as they learn to think for themselves, become confident and also develop the capability of recognising more acutely the areas of exploitation.

Although in principle the fact of empowering women through education has been recognised in the National Policy on Education and the Programme of Action, the Commission suggests the following steps be taken by which the working women themselves and their children, specially the girl child, may benefit:



1. Since one of the reasons for poor enrolment of a girl child and even poorer retention of their enrolment is their contribution in helping the working mothers in domestic work and looking after younger children, and also contributing to the family economy as child labour, it is necessary that there should be shifts for girls at suitable times so that they can assist their mothers in work and go to school. It should be possible for all the school going children in a family to attend the same shift, or else, the girl will be required to remain at home to mind the younger children.
2. To encourage parents to send their girls to afternoon shifts, it should be desirable that a woman helper is provided on an honorarium basis for accompanying the children from the house and back to ensure their enrolment and safety.
3. The same helper as mentioned at (2) above or another helper's services could be utilised for looking after the pre-school siblings, school-going girls in the premises of the school itself.
4. It would be preferable to have a regular creche attached to the primary school where the younger children could be taken care of so that the older child can attend the school.
5. Incentives for sending the girls to school will have to be given to promote their education. In many states, like Haryana, some cash per month and a free uniform are given to scheduled caste girls. Similar facilities including midday meals, free text books and exercise book, could be extended to all girl students at least up to the primary school level. If the girls are attracted to education, they are likely to move away eventually from the back-breaking traditional occupation of their mothers towards better employment.
6. The syllabi need to be made more relevant for the children of rural areas. Practical subjects like animal husbandry, cattle care, soil conservation, agriculture, and social forestry may be added and such options offered along with subjects like history, geography, modern science, and physics.
7. Under the Government Scheme of Condensed Courses being implemented by the Central Social Welfare Board, the girls of adolescent age and above, who acquire education in a non-formal manner, have to appear in the same examination for which children from public schools from metropolitan cities also appear. This needs to be changed. In certain situations, a good grounding in languages, mathematics, general knowledge and some subjects relevant to their life situation, should suffice to get them a school certificate for the purpose of getting jobs at certain levels.
8. It has been mentioned in the Programme of Action, issued by the Ministry

of Human Resources Development, that women teachers should be preferably recruited at the school level to give greater confidence to the parents to send their girl children to the school. The Commission would like to add that it is possible to have more women teachers only if they are posted in their home villages, or nearby villages, to which they belong or into which they marry. Certain States have a policy not to post anyone within 20 km. of their home town. Such a policy should be totally discouraged. Women employees, like teachers or extension workers, need the security of the home and they cannot stay away from their families because of the basic responsibility of looking after the children. If married, the husband and wife should be posted in the same area or as close to each other as possible.

9. The Commission recognises the fact that in the rural areas there are not enough trained women who can be appointed as teachers. Urban-based teachers posted in rural areas tend not to stay in the village to which they are posted, resulting in loss of school hours for the children. The Commission, therefore, recommends an innovation in the basic requirements of school teachers. For primary schools, girls who have completed secondary school or have achieved even middle school level, may be given an intensive training for a period of one year or nine months in certain training colleges of the State Government. After free training, boarding and lodging they should be posted in their home villages, or in the vicinity of their villages. Increasing women teachers would have a direct bearing on the recruitment of girls which would, eventually, improve their chances of employment or self-employment in the non-traditional sector.
10. The primers under the adult education programme do not usually have sufficient material related to women workers which would be of interest to the labouring workers.
11. The text-books both in the formal and informal educational systems perpetuate labouring women's invisibility and stereotyped sex-biased concept of women. The revision of the text-books and primers need to be carried out keeping the objective of bringing of women into greater focus.
12. Greater emphasis has to be given on the vocational aspect of education. Various alternatives of education need to be developed. These alternatives may be developed in a decentralised manner, preferably with an area-specific approach.
13. Vocational training, at present, is also stereotyped and sex-biased. Trades which are more remunerative, and involving modern technology, are by and large beyond the reach of girls thereby restricting their options for employment. This needs serious attention.

14. For the vocational training of girls, there should be a revolving fund from which they may be given scholarships to bear the cost of training and hostel facilities; they should reimburse the amount after they are placed in suitable jobs. The experience of a private trust in this regard has been successful.
15. It is necessary to convince the parents of poor girls regarding the relevance of education to the lives of their daughters. This is possible if education and vocational training have a direct relation to their chances of employability and enhancement in their remuneration. One of the important reasons for women's submitting to exploitation is that they do not have a viable economic alternative.
16. The Commission does realise that literacy in itself is not a solution to the basic problems of poor women, viz. exploitation and hunger. Therefore, the Commission recommends that any attempt to eradicate poverty should help the poor women to gain self-confidence to deal with their environment.

### **Communication network systems**

The channels of communication do not generally portray the reality about labouring women in poverty. The fact that work, for these women, who are at times the sole breadwinners, is a permanent necessity and not a transient phenomenon, is not brought out. Neither are the hard realities of their expectations, long hours of work, low and discriminatory wage and total lack of social support services given much attention. If and when poverty is depicted, specially in the cinema, it is shown as a stepping-stone to a better and more glamorous lifestyle. The distortion of realities by the media has increased the gap of understanding between the different sections of society. Yet communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in the informal sector : without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, Government schemes, banks, and voluntary organisations women can hardly take advantage of them. The Commission therefore recommends the following:

1. The Media must project the working women in the unorganised sector realistically as producers and not merely consumers. Unless they are perceived as workers, their rights will not be recognised.
2. It is necessary to formulate a national policy on communication clearly stating how it plans to achieve its objectives, what is going to be the time period, and institutional structures through which the objectives are to be realized.
3. All the groups which are concerned with the production of media, and/or connected with planning and dissemination, should structurally integrate the participation of socially aware persons. This will enable the planning

group to perceive the gender perspective, and neither become blind to women's issues or err too much in the opposite direction of joining the bandwagon. Media monitoring units should try to help the media to orient themselves to the interest, concerns and development of women in the unorganised sector.

4. Frequent workshops of media persons may be organized to focus generally on problems of women, and specifically on problems of women in the unorganized sector who should also participate in the process. Such workshops would also publicise the successful experiments carried out in the media and help in looking at the labouring women, not as mere objects to be acted upon, but as equal partners in creatively disseminating information.
5. Innovative efforts to communicate should be encouraged. If possible, some percentage of the financial allocation of the concerned Ministries may be reserved for such experiments so that more talents may emerge.
6. Considering the context of poverty and unemployment for large masses of the people, and therefore, a lack of access to electronic media, its overuse should be discouraged. Instead, other forms of interactions such as fairs, 'shibirs', health camps and 'jathas' should be promoted.
7. All the media channels, both in the public sector and the private sector, should take serious note of the Seventh Plan directive that themes which have pernicious consequences of conspicuous consumerism should not be projected. In this context, advertisements displaying women as sex symbols for sales promotion should be seriously dealt with. It is not enough to control pornography through legislative enactment. It is equally necessary not to convey a sex-linked division of labour or women's predilection with feminine pursuits through conservative and traditional stereotypes. A more vigorous action of policy implementation is called for.
8. The public sector media should make deliberate attempts to not only project the problems of women in poverty, but should monitor it in such a way that conflicting role models are not depicted, nor derogatory references to their work made.

To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGOs, women's groups, research organizations, institutes of mass communication, and the media personnel, should be developed. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry should evolve such a network to monitor the project of women, and evolve a code of ethics with regard to the presentation of women in all types of media.

It is recommended that more coverage to women's life and problems in poverty should be given. Care must be taken to avoid sensationalism in the new coverage and more sensitive, sympathetic reporting should be done with regard to this group of women.

There is a need for a well-defined and adequately funded programme in regional languages in readable style, to encourage the publication of data, schemes for women and also make them aware of their rights.

While deploring the fact that television is commercial which reinforces and portrays stereotyped images of women as housewives, which has hardly any relevance to most women, it is recommended that more vigilance be applied in selecting programmes. Many a time, seemingly 'women oriented' programmes are in reality superficial discussions of women's issues and create a myth of being women oriented.

It is recommended that taking a cue from the grass-roots organizations, video be used as consciousness-raising tool by telecasting programmes which give information and guidelines in a visual manner. Further, appreciating the power of songs sung in traditional tunes, but having feminist content which is very effective in mobilizing women, Doordarshan should collect such songs in collaboration with activist groups and prepare video cassettes to be played in the programmes of 'Ghar Bahar' and 'Krishi Darshan'.

Women's programmes should not be treated as 'purdah hour', both on TV and the radio. Awareness with regard to problems of women in the unorganised sector is necessary for both men and women. Therefore the timings for the broadcast of such programmes should be flexible.

The findings of the Commission during its tours indicated that the radio is more popular with women and, comparatively, they have more access to it. It is recommended that careful planning in the use of information dissemination be done. Further, it is very necessary to reschedule the timings of the programme. Only those women who are not working can listen to the radio in the afternoon. Most of the women workers prefer to have relevant programmes in the late evening.

In view of the proposed expansion of television and radio, efforts must be made to include the component of poor women in planning. In order that these women benefit from these media, more community sets should be made available and group-viewing facilitated.

In contrast to the present hierarchy of programmes in Doordarshan and radio it is recommended that the depiction of the problems of vast majority be given greater priority.

Producers, largely belonging to the middle and upper classes, have limited notions of the problems of the target audience. Hence, they need to be made aware of these women and their problems, so as to sensitively portray them in their work situation.

It is very frustrating to note that the commercial cinema does not project the self-employed women in a realistic manner. On the contrary, it gives a false idea about their life and never considers work as a necessity for women. Depiction of poverty is more used as a springboard to sentimentalise the role of the hero or the mother. Rape scenes are included for titillating the audience rather than depicting the true vulnerability of these women. It is recommended that there be more strict control of production of such films. The dehumanising portrayal must be condemned.

Regional language films have, on quite a few occasions, depicted the problems of poor women sympathetically and with understanding. Such films must be dubbed in Hindi and other regional languages so that the message may reach a wider audience.

Innovative film producers must be given special encouragement, not merely for producing, but also help in distribution.

It is very sad to note the poor performance of Department of Audio Visual Publicity (DAVP). The materials imply that poor men and women are foolish and they have to be given advice from a pedestal. It is recommended that more sensitivity be exhibited in conveying the message whether it is Family Planning, or on the use of mechanised equipment in agriculture.

The development of Information Dissemination System, in order to be effective, should take the following steps: A total training/orientation/re-training plan should be formulated for each development programme for women and, wherever possible, for a common cluster of development programmes for women, incorporating therein the hierarchy of functionaries, diverse groups of beneficiaries/participants, and training methodologies with the specific objective of developing knowledge, attitudes and practice of various development programmes for women. A network among governmental and non-governmental organizations and educational institutions should be made part of the training plan with a view to making optimum use of the existing resources.

A well-coordinated strategy could be evolved by an integrated group comprising of Block level extension officials, bank officials, health officials, and District Rural Development Agency officials for use of oral, visual, and audio-visual methods of communication for development programmes.

Communications support systems for the development programmes must reach the intended beneficiaries in terms of their own communication matrix and in a manner which provides a comprehensive effect, access to information, skills in using the information, and ability to articulate feedback which may ultimately make the policy formulation process much more meaningful.

The findings of the Commission point out that dissemination of information from the Government to the people is highly unsatisfactory. Not only is the top down approach counter-productive, but many a time the functionaries are unaware of the work and problems of women in the unorganized sector. It is necessary to increase the effectiveness of the dissemination of information by government to the people and to increase the awareness of the functionaries regarding work and problems of women.

It is recommended that, considering the social set up in rural areas, efforts must be made to involve gram sevikas and mukhya sevikas to take up the task of reaching out to women.

**Recommendations for grassroots organizations:** Though alternative structures have been more effective in their understanding and in reaching out and getting the participation of poor women, it is recommended that, wherever possible, mainstream media and organisations be used. This would help in wider coverage as well as in bridging the gap between the two.

To get more authentic picture of the exposure and use of the media, more research on audience, readers and viewers should be undertaken.

### **Legislative protection**

The poor labouring women work in a situation of deprivation and exploitation. The Government has passed a series of legislation to protect their status as workers, increase their remuneration, and to ensure them certain benefits. Of all the labour legislations that are in the statute book, and which are directed towards the amelioration of the workers, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, claims to be the most important and relevant to the workers in self-employed and unorganized sectors of employment. A large number of employments, including those in which women account for a significant, if not a substantial, proportion of workers, have not been included in the schedule to the Act by both the Central and State Government. However, even where the minimum rates of wages are fixed or revised, they are grossly inadequate; even more unsatisfactory is that even these low rates of wages are not implemented by and large. The enforcement machinery is both inadequate and indifferent, particularly in women related employments. That the defaults take place in those sectors where the government, both central and state, is the employer, as for example in construction, in Relief work, in forestry, in Railways, Demonstration Farms, Free Trade Zones, Ports, and Mines, is deplorable. Where the Government is the defaulter, it is no wonder that the enforcement machinery, inefficient and

indifferent as it is, is totally apathetic.

The other important and progressive legislations enacted are the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, the Interstate Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1979 and the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961; in practice, however, the poor working women have been denied the benefits under such legislations for various reasons. Apart from the implementation machinery being poor and ineffective, some employers have resorted to retrenching women or not employing women to avoid their statutory responsibility. Being unorganized, individual working women are not in a position to exert pressure on the implementation agencies, and being poor without having adequate work around the year they cannot afford to resort to legal remedies which are both cumbersome and expensive.

Moreover, the basic feature of all the labour legislations is the existence of employer-employee relationship and the consequent need to define an employer, and the employee. However, the normal labour laws become inapplicable or unenforceable in the case of majority of women workers who are engaged in agriculture, construction work, or home-based work and it becomes necessary to evolve patterns and systems by which, through some kind of self-regulating mechanism in which women have an empowering role, the desired results could be achieved. Seeing the complexities of the situation in which the poor labouring women work, the National Commission recommends the following:

1. The major contributory cause for women being compelled to take up unremunerative and arduous occupations, is a total lack of choice. The Commission therefore recommends that "the right to work", already a Directive Principle, should be made a Fundamental Right.
2. Coupled with the right to employment is the women's right to a reasonable wage. The production process must be so organized as to enable the women to get adequate employment and to earn Rs.500/- per month from her labour. The wages should be paid in full and in time. The present system of fixing piece-rate is neither scientific nor equitable. It is recommended that the piece-rate must be so fixed that it will enable women workers to earn, for 8 hours' work, a wage equal to the time-rated minimum wage. For home-based workers an additional amount calculated at 25 per cent of the minimum rate of wages will have to be paid. There should be a system of fallback wages being paid in situations where an employer is not able to provide a full day's employment. Exemption from payment of minimum wages under any circumstances should be prohibited. There should be a system of a national or regional minimum wage.
3. Despite the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 being on the statute book for over 12 years, discrimination in the matter of wages is widely prevalent. This must be corrected through better enforcement and also wide dissemination



of the scope and content of the law. The tendency to classify tasks generally done by women to be of a slightly inferior nature should be corrected. For this purpose, it is necessary to broad-band into one category those activities which are of the same or similar nature of work.

4. To ensure that employment of women does not get reduced, as has been happening in the past, particularly in industries like cotton textiles, jute, and coal-mining, it is recommended that the retrenchment of women in any establishment (irrespective of the number of persons employed) must require the prior permission of a designated authority. Consistent with this, the provision of 'last come, first go' in the matter of retrenchment should not be made applicable to women workers.
5. The National Commission also recommends the setting up of an Equal Opportunities Commission to be set up under a Central Law which must have wide powers of investigations, direction, advice and monitoring. It ought to have, like the Monopolies and Restricted Trade Practices Commission, a separate wing for investigations which can take up investigation either on a complaint or a reference made, or suo moto, undertake promotional and educational work as well. It would also be empowered to make grants to other bodies and individuals for independent research projects or for educational activities or training programmes as well as have its own research services. Such a Commission would be a strict watch-dog organisation, to oversee the implementation of laws and policies in all areas involving women. It may be required to present to Parliament each year a report on its activities and findings; this must be enabled to be discussed in both houses of Parliament as well as in the various State Legislatures in adequate detail. This Commission, the existence of which must be widely made known, would be a forum whose doors would always be open to anyone, more particularly women who have not received a fair and equal deal.
6. The Commission recommends establishment of Tripartite Boards, for the reasons that no law, however well conceived, will be of benefit to women workers unless they have a major hand in the implementation of these laws and this should be achieved only at a Tripartite Board in which workers will have as many representatives as the Government and the employers. Women workers will be adequately represented proportionately to their numerical strength. The Tripartite Boards will not only regulate the implementation of legislation, but also contribute in making women workers visible and to bring to focus the contribution they make to the family income and to the economy and above all in empowering them, to understand their rights and to demand them, not merely as beneficiaries under paternalistic system but as partners and participants in a production process. There is no other method by which employer-employee nexus can be established, the Tripar-

tite Board arrangement providing for a corpus of employers and corpus of employees, instead of individual employer with his employees. In this type of arrangement, it will also be possible for the Board to take on planning functions in respect of the activity concerned, and to encourage promotion of cooperatives wherever feasible, with the Board helping the cooperative in the matter of supply of raw materials and marketing.

7. The Commission recommends the setting up of a Central Fund from which welfare and social security measures for women workers should be financed. Apart from a levy on individual employers it would be desirable that a levy is imposed on the major industries or substitute industries for the benefit of the small activities that the home-based workers carry on. Even now, there is the practice of levying cess on the organised cotton textile mill sector for helping the handloom sector; in the bidi rolling industry, a levy is imposed on the bidis rolled for financing welfare activities for the workers. Similar arrangements could be thought of, including a levy on exports, for example, on the garment export industry or gem cutting industry; likewise the plastic industry could be made to contribute for the welfare of workers in these sectors where the demand for their product is adversely affected by competition from the plastic goods. Sources of such additional funding can be explored.
8. All dues payable by the employer towards wages or levy must be made the first charge; their recovery where it becomes necessary, must be through a summary procedure. To ensure that no defaults occur, it would be necessary to have some hold on the activities of the employer, either through licensing authorities or tax authorities.
9. It is recommended that the Labour Department must be the nodal Department for enforcement of all Labour Laws.
10. The Commission recommends that Women's organisations, trade unions, workers' representatives, Government's women functionaries and individual workers be vested with powers to inspect work sites and to file complaints on behalf of the workers.
11. It is recommended that penalties for infringement of labour laws which affect women should be made most stringent and any further default to be made a continuing offence.
12. It came to the notice of the Commission that cases in Labour Courts take unduly long to get disposed of. The Commission recommends that Labour Courts and trade authorities be vested with ministerial powers, time limits for filing claims of objections be fixed, and periodical reviews be made.
13. The burden of proof of establishing that Labour Laws and rules have been

implemented to be wholly on the employer.

14. Free legal aid for women workers should be made available in practice.
15. The Commission recommends that wherever necessary the changes in labour laws should be brought about. In view of the Commission's recommendations, an omnibus legislation may be undertaken to amend the relevant laws suitably.
16. The Commission strongly recommends a special drive for imparting legal literacy to women workers.
17. A comprehensive Minor Forest Produce Workers Act may be enacted on the lines of Bidi and Cigar Workers Act so that the working condition is regulated and social security as well as accident compensation are provided and piece-rate is fixed in consultation with labour representatives.
18. Cooperative law exists at each state level, except the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act. Most state laws vie with each other for being anti-cooperative. The laws have provided unlimited powers to the Registrar for registration, bye laws, elections, appointment of staff, and investment of funds. The corruption in the cooperative department and harassment methods adopted by the department are well known. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the Department facilitates the formation of cooperatives, rather than exploits them. The Registrar could regulate the cooperatives and not manage them.

Keeping in view the delays experienced, in getting Cooperatives registered under the relevant State Cooperative Societies Act, it is for consideration whether a scheme of provisional registration within a month of the application being made can be incorporated in the law.

## **Organising**

The National Commission has observed that the lack of organisation in the informal sector is the root cause of exploitation of women workers. At present, the process of organisation for women workers is very limited and fragmented. Individually women are not in a position to fight against low and discriminatory wages, exploitative working conditions and violation of the law as they lack bargaining power. At the same time attempts at organising are thwarted by vested interests resulting in further victimization.

The Commission recommends evolving of a strategy to promote organising of women on a large scale. The Government should play an active and positive role in this context because if the organising process is to be encouraged among this

weakest section of the people it must be supported by the state. The National Commission recommends that the following suggestions be followed:

1. Not to convert a legal demand into a law and order problem

The most damaging role that a state agency can play is to accuse a group of agitating women of creating a 'law and order' problem and then arresting them or using violence on them. This crushes all signs of awareness and strength among the workers. It is strongly recommended that when a group of workers agitate non-violently to demand a legal right such as minimum wages, abolition of bonded labour or legal access to land, then the state agencies such as the police should not only abstain from any action against them but should protect and defend them.

2. Support for organising efforts

Whenever self-employed women organize themselves including on the issue of implementation of government programmes, the state should unequivocally support and side with them. By doing so, government programmes will also actually reach the poor. It will also be easier for the state to interact with workers and ensure that they remain the focus of all development activities.

3. Orientation of government functionaries to support organizing

Apart from support to the poor at the policy-making level, the state should set up mechanisms whereby government functionaries at all levels of the bureaucracy are oriented towards poor women. This orientation would include an understanding of the need to support workers' organizing efforts and ways in which government functionaries could actively support and work with workers.

4. Developing support centres

Centres where self-employed women can obtain information on their legal rights, existing government policies and programmes, and the implementation agencies for these should be established by the state.

5. Representation at the Policy-making and planning levels

Self-employed women should have proper representation in all policy-making and planning of the nation's development. This will ensure that the concerns and priorities of the poorest of workers will determine the national plans, policies and programmes.

6. Creation of legislation

Progressive legislation can both initiate and further encourage organizing, as has been discussed earlier. Thus such legislation should be developed in consultation with women workers.

7. Developing legislation for forms of organisation

Existing legislation pertaining to forms of organization should be reviewed, and changes which will encourage organizing should be made. These changes should include simplification of procedures and regulations. In addition, legislation for alternative forms of organization, more suited to the organizing of poor women, should be developed.

8. Support for training

The state should provide resources for training which would assist and encourage the organizing process. Where such resources exist (for example Workers' Education Board and Social Welfare Boards at the Central and State levels) they should be made available to women workers. Workers should determine the kinds of training programmes to be developed, so that they would be suitable and oriented to their organizing efforts.

9. Support for formation of regional or Central association of workers

The State should encourage and support the information of networks and associations of self-employed women workers at regional and national levels. In this way, workers' collective strength for organizing will be enhanced and they will also have an opportunity to interact and share their experiences with each other.

10. The Government should reserve raw materials and markets for co-operatives of self-employed women. This could be done on the line of the Gujarat GR.

It is seen that the government often acts or reacts according to political pressures exerted over it. In that case the vast majority of the poor self-employed women will never be able to build up their political visibility or the organised strength to pressurise the government for policies in their favour.

Therefore, the government should, on its own, take action to create a positive atmosphere in the country for these women to organise themselves to know, demand and enjoy their rights, given by the government itself, to defend their rightful place in the economy against forces that erode their means of livelihood, to play an active role in decision making and thus participate in the various development processes. It is clear that unless the capabilities of these women are increased, the country will not be able to progress as desired by all of us.

**Women's voluntary groups:** At present, there are two types of voluntary groups working in the field of women : one is an organisation not necessarily of women, but working for women and the second, an organisation of women, working for women. Although the number of women's own organisations need to be greatly increased, both types of organisations should be encouraged. The spread of these organisations is not uniform throughout the country, their numbers are small and largely concentrated in townships, urban areas, and district headquarters. The activities of these groups are also of a limited nature. Some of them take up welfare activities like childcare, care of destitute women, short stay centres and crisis centres. Some of them have taken up developmental activities, but these are generally linked with the Government schemes under which grants are available.

Since the voluntary organisations have the advantage of community involvement, and help to promote voluntary action, the National Commission recommends that they should be actively assisted by providing finances, training and managerial inputs.

The organisations should be encouraged to enlarge their activities to:

1. Create awareness.
2. Mobilise and organise poor women.
3. Carry out training programmes for creating awareness and leadership amongst women.
4. Formulate and implement developmental and economic projects for women. Such projects should not be restricted to Government schemes only.
5. The creativity and innovativeness of the voluntary groups should be encouraged by providing flexibility in their programmes.

The Government should provide legislative support and removal of restrictive legislation. This needs to be done if voluntary agencies can play such a role.

**Mahila Mandals:** In many States, Mahila Mandals exist historically as in the North-East, where they are playing a significant role in the community. In other States, village level Mahila Mandals have come up after independence. They have not been effective, as they have been unable to involve a majority of the poor women in the village.

With development and poverty alleviation programmes reaching the interior parts of the country, women in the villages have become aware, and are today eager for action.

The Commission also observed that the Mahila Mandals have tremendous potential in actively involving village women in changing the rural scene, but this potential is still not utilized. Therefore it strongly recommends the following:

1. The village Mahila Mandal should be vigorously utilised in the implementation of the poverty alleviation programmes of the Government.
2. The Mahila Mandal should be encouraged to initiate innovative programmes like smokeless chullah, sulabh latrines, income-generating skill training, water management and biogas plants.
3. The Government should provide adequate support for the Mahila Mandal in the form of resources like funds, a 'pucca' house, a battery transistor and a tape-recorder, electronically recorded songs and dramas, which carry effective messages and information.
4. The Mahila Mandal should be provided with guidance from the earlier proposed District Women's Development Officer, and the proposed Development officers will be in charge of monitoring and liaising areas.

The Government must give recognition to the Mahila Mandals. There will be resistance from the local officials and vested interest groups against the Mahila Mandal becoming active, so a strong sustained support will be absolutely necessary from the government. The Commission recognises that this is the only way to involve village women actively in the development process.

**Cooperatives:** The experience with Cooperatives has been a mixed one. While it has been successful in certain sectors like dairying, and in certain states like Gujarat, and Maharashtra, it has not been successful in other enterprises and States. Yet, the importance of the cooperative as a whole in organising people, in enhancing productivity and employment and in equitable distribution of profits, is well-recognised by the Government and by workers themselves. However the participation of women in the cooperative movement is very limited, due to illiteracy, cumbersome procedures of enrolment and registration of cooperatives, inadequate financial support and marketing facilities, and finally the lack of effective leadership. The cooperative is an important forum which can meet the needs of self-employed women. In setting up the Cooperatives every caution should be exercised that they work in the interest of the poor women. To overcome the problems enumerated, the National Commission recommends that:

1. There should be an expansion in the coverage of the cooperative movement in new and important areas like farm labour, artisans, cereal processing, fodder and fuel development, fruit preservation, and other agro-based industries.

2. In most general cooperatives, we have seen that women are left out of the membership of the cooperative because they do not own any assets. The Commission, therefore, recommends that when a particular kind of work is done jointly by men and women, in a family, both of them should be made members of the cooperative. Forming of women's cooperatives should be encouraged and even in mixed cooperatives, they should be inducted as office bearers.
3. A practical difficulty in forming a cooperative arises as many of the concerned persons, for example, in urban slums, do not have any permanent address. It is suggested that the concerned authority should recognise that, if the organization which is working for these people has a permanent address, it can be considered adequate for the personal identity/security of the workers.
4. The common experience all over the country is that, due to the corruption and bureaucratic red tapism, the registration of a cooperative takes anywhere from one to four years and their procedures are too cumbersome. Therefore, a practical solution could be that, like the credit camps which are held at the district level at present, there should be camps organised for registration of cooperatives where the applicant cooperative should be invited with all the relevant papers, and the concerned official would also come with all the necessary documents and at the camp itself all the formalities could be finalised so that the cooperatives can be registered in a short period, or provisional registration can be given. To catalyse and mobilise women to enter the cooperatives, the Commission recommends that a spearhead team of trained women and men should be formed to reach potential members in the female-prone large employment sectors like agriculture, dairying and fisheries. The Commission draws the attention of the government to the fact that it is a long and painful process for poor women to rise to be partners in the cooperatives and entrepreneurs, from the existing status of labourers. They need strong, sympathetic and constant support from the government at every level, particularly at the local level. In this context, it is essential to prescribe a pre-cooperative phase; therefore, the Commission strongly recommends the government:
  1. to recognise fully the need of pre-cooperative phase of one to three years
  2. to provide the required training to women in development issues to build up the consciousness of the rural poor women
  3. to provide technical training to women producers to maximise outputs



4. to build up all the credit/subsidy linkages to ensure poor women's access to finance for the inputs, in their own names
5. to provide sufficient time for a strong group of women producers to emerge, which can facilitate the self-management of their cooperatives
6. to develop their capability in dealing with government officials and local vested interests

Adequate funds should be flowing in the form of loans from NABARD, and other banks and financial institutions to make the cooperative viable. The Commission also recommends to the Cooperative Banks that:

1. all efforts should be made to reach at least 10 per cent of its lending to women engaged in home based and small industries, and for building up assets like land and cattle.
2. soft loans and subsidies from the bank's own finances, and from the government, should be earmarked for women borrowers, and targets fixed accordingly, every year.

**Trade unions:** Large-scale industrialisation in India, which began roughly at the time of independence, was modelled on the developed nations'. The direction of the labour movement, and the role of the state/government in protecting the interest of the employees, were all based on the models of these highly industrialised countries. However, in spite of the impetus given to industrialisation, our economy is still largely agricultural and has not become industrialised as a whole. Barring a few local level unions in the country, the major labour unions are still engaged in the problems of the workers in the organised sector even though, in a country like ours, most of the goods and services are provided by the self-employed and informal sectors of the economy. The Commission feels that unless the workers in these sectors, whose need for unionisation and protection is the greatest, are brought into the mainstream of the labour movement, the latter has very little relevance for them. It is high time the major labour unions took the labour of the unorganised sector in their fold and extended their trade union knowhow in securing higher income and social security to them.

The National Commission recommends that:

1. All the major labour unions should be encouraged to establish a separate wing for the unorganised labour.
2. The women's wing of major labour unions should be given more resources and support by the Labour Ministry to unionise the unorganised women and

integrate them in the main body of the union.

3. The major labour unions should be requested to take up surveys and in-depth studies of the problems of contract labour, home-based workers, out-workers in the major industries and trades, and influence the government in making suitable changes in policy and law.
4. The major trade unions should be supported in their efforts in building up solidarity between the workers of the formal sector and the informal sector within a particular trade/industry/plant/unit.
5. The major labour unions, apart from resorting to collective bargaining activities, should be encouraged in the government to take up various constructive programmes to augment the economic and social life of the workers in the self-employed and informal sectors.

## **Training**

The National Commission recommends that voluntary agencies be sanctioned grants for implementation of programmes for women in areas of health, communication and welfare. In the sanction letter, a condition should be placed, maintaining that a certain number of hours per week should be devoted to imparting training in areas of building leadership, organising, accounting, and general awareness.

The extension workers are expected to play the role of catalyst. Therefore, short orientation courses should be held by which they are sensitised to the problems of women; they have to be trained to help women or groups of women to take advantage of various types of facilities available under government, semi-government and banking and financial institutions, and to organize themselves in cooperatives, Mahila Mandals, and other types of organisations.

The third category of personnel to be trained at the grassroots level are the representatives of the voluntary agencies. There are not enough voluntary agencies which impart training to women in acquiring skills relating to credit, raw-materials, marketing, and in the preparation of project proposals and application for loans and subsidies.

As far as the infrastructure for training is concerned, it has to be developed at the district level, divisional level, state level and national level. At the national level, an Institute of Training should be set up which, apart from carrying out training programmes will also formulate guidelines and help the other constituent units to carry out training programmes.

Vocational Training Institutes, Industrial Technical Institutes, Polytechnics

etc. should hold regular meetings with local industrialists to know their general and specific demands, and organise training programmes accordingly. Especially for women and young girls in rural areas, setting up of a large number of polytechnics is essential, with dormitory and creche facilities, in order to provide them with skills that have a real value in their own environment, and which will provide them with a steady income. Examples are repair and maintenance of charkhas, handlooms, waterpumps, biogas plant and training in poultry, cattle care, veterinary service, testing of milk, simple accountancy, making smokeless chullaahs, sulabh shauchalayas, soakpits and such other useful trades and services.

Follow-up guidance should be provided to the trainee to enable her to get a job or to start her own enterprise.

Although the Commission is not in favour of recommending reservation in jobs, it strongly recommends reservation of seats in vocational training institutes. At least 30 per cent of the seats should be reserved for women. In order to give priority to poor women, the Commission recommends that reservation should not be only on the basis of academic qualifications, but also on income levels. Also, the entry in the trades should be such that women's employment opportunities are diversified and do not remain stereotyped and sex-biased.

The extension service provided in this field should be strengthened, and the number of women extension workers increased. They should help women not only by providing information about Government schemes under which benefits can be availed of, but should actively assist women in taking advantage of these schemes and assisting them to form cooperatives and societies like Mahila Mandals. The Mahila Mandals should be energised to promote more economic activities and assist women groups to get subsidies, fertilisers etc.

Women should be mentioned as specific target groups for all agriculture development programmes and efforts should be made to involve them in decision making at all levels.

### **Supportive services and other programmes**

In line with the approach of the Commission that all women are 'workers', the distinguishing feature of a woman worker is her responsibility for bearing and rearing children. In addition, the responsibility of doing all household chores and looking after the aged and sick have traditionally been her responsibility. It is for these reasons that the woman worker in the informal sector has to go through a life of drudgery, and long years of arduous work with no respite. It is, therefore, necessary that social support services should be provided to women workers for assisting them to do their work at home and outside better, and with less worry.

**Maternity benefits and childcare facilities:** The Commission is of the considered

opinion that no solution to the problems of women at work will be complete without taking into account her reproductive functions. This can be effectively tackled through maternity benefits and childcare. The maternity benefits, on the scale provided under the Maternity Benefits Act, should be universally available to all women. The responsibility for this should be borne by all employers, irrespective of whether or not they employ women through a levy calculated as a percentage of the wage bill and placed in a separate fund from which the maternity benefits can be provided. In respect of a large number of women, like home-based workers, where the employer is not identifiable, the responsibility for providing maternity benefits must lie with the State Governments. The Commission does not consider it necessary to restrict the benefit to two or three confinements because we are satisfied that the universal availability of maternity benefit and childcare will, in the long run, lead to smaller families.

Childcare facilities are provided for in various labour laws. However, the provisions of the Labour Laws are generally not being implemented in favour of women and at times it has led to retrenchment of women workers because the employers would like to evade their statutory responsibility. It is therefore necessary to ensure an extended system of childcare throughout the country. This will directly help in reducing the burden on women and in the all-round development of the child. The National Commission recommends the following:

1. All childcare services should meet the intersecting needs of women and girls. They should provide for the healthy development and welfare for the young child, meeting the need of the working mothers, for healthy and convenient places for her children to stay while she is at work and to eliminate the burden of childcare for older children especially girls to enable them to attend school.
2. For better and effective implementation of the labour laws which provide for childcare facilities, the implementation machinery should be strengthened.
3. A substantial increase in the number of creches all over the country with improved facilities, better infrastructure and flexible timings so that mothers are encouraged to send their children to the centres.
4. The existing Anganwadi Centres under the ICDS need to be upgraded with proper day care centres so that the full working hours of the mother are taken care of.
5. The setting up of family-based day care centres with support from voluntary agencies. Such centres will be set up by suitably trained individual local workers, preferably in their own homes, to take care of a certain number of children.

6. The setting up of social-based day care centres under the auspices of the local primary schools. This will serve the dual purpose of encouraging enrolment of girls in schools and the care of pre-primary children.
7. Setting up of women's organisation-based day care centres supported by cooperatives, mahila mandals, and unions. This will enable women who are associated with these organisations to utilize the facilities provided by these centres and the expertise available at these organisations could be useful in running these centres.
8. Setting up of mobile day care units for migrant/shifting workers to be run by an independent agency but funded by the employer. This will be on the lines of Mobile Creches which have proved quite successful in Bombay and Delhi.
9. New approaches and diverse programmes for working groups including home-based workers and seasonal agricultural workers should be developed. Since childcare is essentially an individual oriented programme, innovations will have to be made to cater to the needs of various groups. Such innovations should be promoted by the government in consultation with women workers, voluntary agencies, and experts in the field of childcare.
10. Childcare, by its very nature, is a small scale and localised operation, which has to respond to the needs of women, children and girls. For this, a three tier structure is recommended. The actual running of the service should be at the local level entrusted to organizations like balwadis and anganwadis, Mahila Mandals, panchayats, cooperatives and unions. The supervision, funding, training and monitoring should be at an intermediary level, entrusted to organisations like voluntary agencies, district authorities, municipal authorities, charitable trusts and public sector undertakings. At the apex level, there should be an umbrella organisation functioning as an autonomous body similar to the Labour Welfare Board under the joint auspices of the Ministries/Departments of Women and Child Development, Education, and Labour.
11. It is recommended that funds from such a service should be drawn from the budgetary provisions made in the budgets of Ministry/Department of Labour, Women and Child Development and Education, from employers in the form of welfare cess to be uniformly applied to all employers/producers regardless of the number of employees and the sex of the worker employed, to worker parents in the form of contributions from trade unions and in other cases through individual contributions made directly at the local level.

**Support for destitute women:** The incidence of destitution is quite high amongst the impoverished women labourers. This situation may arise as a result of

widowhood, migration, illness of the husband, or as a result of his addictive habits like alcoholism or taking of drugs. In this context, the National Commission recommends:

1. Labelling of such vulnerable women as 'destitutes', 'distressed', 'helpless' is counter-productive and does not help them in the long run. Their worth as workers should be recognised and the entire approach should be viewed from that angle.
2. The number of short-stay homes and crises homes are very meagre--their numbers are required to be substantially augmented.
3. The running of the homes also needs to be monitored closely, to ensure the well-being of the inmates and prevent them from becoming victims of corruption and mismanagement. They need a well-trained staff who can understand their needs, as also counselling services.
4. Inputs of vocational training and medical health should be inbuilt in the running of the homes.
5. After training and upgradation of skills placements in jobs and services should be given top priority so that such women can become self-reliant and independent.
6. Voluntary agencies are already working in the field of helping destitute women. They need to be encouraged through financial assistance. The quantum of assistance should take into view the fact that some of the workers are required to be professionals and well-paid. Representatives of voluntary agencies need regular orientation courses which should keep them abreast of new techniques and developments. Some of these agencies are being run as in the nineteenth century.

**Old age pension:** The State as well as society owes a debt to those people who, because of their advanced age, are no longer in a position to work but have contributed their due share all their working lives. The plight of old women who, in a majority of cases, are widows, is pathetic, as they have no social security, and no savings, and are reduced to a state of beggary. A scheme of old age pension and pension for widows exists in many states but the amount given (like Rs.60/- per month) is very meagre. It is often delayed because of late sanction of budget and those widows whose adult sons are employed are not eligible for the pension. The National Commission recommends the following measures to alleviate their condition:

1. The meagre amount of pension should be enhanced and supplemented with some monthly provisions of foodgrains and supply of a saree every six

months through fair price shops and there should be priority in getting free medical treatment.

2. The delay in getting pension should be totally eliminated and the amounts, both in cash and kind, should be disbursed regularly on the stipulated dates.
3. The linkage with the income of sons cuts at the very root of self-dependence. The woman is left at the mercy of her son who, in such circumstances of poverty and deprivation, is in any case not inclined to help. Pension should be given irrespective of the employment of the son and based on the rights of the woman alone, who has contributed in her lifetime as producer and reproducer.
4. In case of younger widows, the thrust should be to provide her with suitable training and employment opportunities. She should be given preference in training, in asset building and in getting loans.

**Prostitutes/devdasis:** Prostitutes/devdasis suffer from a number of health problems, particularly from sexually transmitted diseases. The prostitutes with whom the Commission members talked also said that they are sick for 10 to 15 days in a month. During this period, they cannot even earn any income. At the Municipal/Government hospitals they are looked down upon and not given proper medical treatment, and the private doctors charge exorbitantly for medicines.

The Commission recommends that there should be regular health check-ups and clinics for these women, located preferably in the neighbourhoods where they live.

The prostitutes have to live a secluded life due to their low status in society. Their children become victims of this social ostracism. These women try their best to give a better life to their children, but they cannot overcome the negative social attitudes. For instance, it is very humiliating when their children are denied admission to good schools because they are unable to give their father's name at the time of admission. The Commission recommends that there should be a policy that the father's name should not be required for admission in a school.

It is also recommended that there should be more openings for residential schools for different income-groups and children of prostitutes should be given admission in residential schools on a priority basis.

These women, due to the socially unacceptable life they lead, are generally cut off from family relationships and are not married. So, in their old age, they do not have anyone to depend on. Many of them take resort to begging. The Commission strongly recommends for an old age pension scheme which will help them take care of their basic necessities and their children's education.

Most of the women get into this occupation when there are no alternatives for survival, due to poverty. To provide an alternative, greater effort to offer training and employment to these women to enable them to lead more dignified life should be made. The alternative provided should be attractive enough, so that the women are not driven back to their earlier profession.

The women who try to run away from the brothels and take shelter find it extremely difficult to get support/shelter. The rules regulating homes for destitute women, 'Nari Niketans' should be more flexible so that the women have an assurance of getting a shelter.

In IRDP female-headed households are assisted with loans. But in the case of devdasis, who invariably are the sole earners, they are not accepted as IRDP beneficiaries. In this regard, the Commission recommends that in all anti-poverty programmes, their economic status should be considered.

The situation of these women should be regarded with sympathy by all those who are trying to help these women, instead of taking a moralistic stand. Also, a more integrated approach towards their rehabilitation including shelter, employment, and education for their children should be adopted by the helping agencies.

**Drug addiction:** The drug menace is no longer limited to the urban elite but has spread to urban slums and rural areas. The problem has taken the form of a serious crisis in the border states like Manipur and Nagaland in the North-East. Women are the worst sufferers because of a drug problem in their family. Due to the addiction, the male members, particularly the young and able-bodied, do not provide any economic contribution. On the contrary, they become a burden to the family and take away whatever little earnings the women bring in, after working for 12-14 hours per day. The Commission's recommendations towards reducing the plight of these women are:

1. There should be strict enforcement of laws to prevent drug trafficking and exemplary penalties in case of violation of the law.
2. The women, whose husbands/sons are known to be addicts, should be given priority for anti-poverty/development programmes instead of considering only families where the male member is absent.
3. A more community-based approach should be adopted in the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. The de-addiction centres and curative services should not only be limited to urban areas but spread to remote rural areas.
4. Local women's groups, like the Mothers' Club in Nagaland, should be involved in identification of cases, treatment, and rehabilitation of addicts.
5. These local centres can be provided training by an expert who can also



design and implement the plan for awareness-building about drug addiction and measures to be taken by the family of the addicts. The Government, at all levels, should support this activity.

**Alcoholism:** All over the country, the Commission met many women who were agitated over one common issue that was ruining their life--alcoholism amongst the men in their family and in the community.

Women are directly affected by this problem. A large number of women are the sole supporters of their families due to alcoholism amongst their husbands. The men not only fail to contribute, but even take away whatever income the wife brings into the family. Harassment, including wife-beating and violence in the family, accompanies the problem of alcoholism, affecting the children in the family.

At the community level, the women find that their safety is at stake due to increasing incidence of alcoholism particularly in hilly areas, women are scared of sending their daughters to school or coming back late in the evening after work. They do not even find support or security from the police or other powerful sections of the community. The Commission recommends:

1. Although in a number of places during the tour, women recommended total prohibition, the Commission feels that total prohibition may not be a realistic solution. However steps should be taken to discourage opening of new liquor shops.

The government approach needs to be altered. It should not just view liquor as a source of income to the revenue department but also consider the social implications before taking any policy decisions. The women in Himachal Pradesh said "We have been asking for schools for the last 20 years but we have not got any yet; we have not asked for a theka (liquor shop) but still every few months new thekas are coming up." The Government should have a policy about the number of shops permissible, depending on the population of the region. Beyond that, no new licences should be issued. The policy and the rules laid down should be strictly enforced.

2. All the unauthorised liquor dens should be closed and strict action should be taken by the State Government against the offenders and the local officials who are involved or supporting these activities.
3. Before opening any new liquor shop in a village, the Panchayat/Government should consult public opinion and a new shop should be sanctioned only if a majority (2/3) of the population are in favour of opening new liquor shops.
4. No liquor shops should be opened within 3 kms from schools, colleges, or bus stops.

5. There should be proper regulation about the number, location and timings of the liquor shops and strict enforcement of these regulations.
6. Mahila Mandals should be given powers, parallel to the Panchayat, so that their opinion can influence the local power structure. The experience of many grassroots organisations like AMM (Bombay), and SUTRA (HP), has demonstrated that in our country, specially amongst poor women, the problem of alcoholism can be tackled better by organizing the women as a whole rather than by individual counselling. It is essential to see this problem as a social rather than individual or personal problem of the family of the alcoholics.
7. In many parts of the country brewing liquor is very common. It is generally observed that illicit brewing amongst the poor is carried out more for subsistence in the agricultural economy, as there is no regular employment throughout the year. Therefore, provisions of alternate source of employment and regulation of employment conditions would considerably reduce the incidence of illicit brewing of liquor.
8. A policy should be formulated in the case of women whose alcoholic husbands are in regular jobs, that the major part of the man's salary should be paid to the wife, thus enabling her to have some control over the family income.
9. Special efforts should be made to include the wives of alcoholics in all anti-poverty programmes and particularly to give them assets in their names. This will give the women some security, because it would not enable the man to sell off the assets.

**Housing and toilet facilities:** Housing for the poor has been recognized as one of their basic requirements. Housing for women has an added dimension since traditionally they rarely own land or house. Housing involves more than a roof over one's head, as it includes social and community facilities and is connected with employment and earnings. For women who are more home-based and often use their home as workplace this is of crucial importance. Rural and urban housing have to be considered separately since the context in both cases is different.

The problem in urban areas concerns the slum dwellers who face terrible overcrowding, lack of essential services, terrorisation by local thugs, and finally, the constant threat of eviction and demolition.

The problem in rural areas relates to the progressive destruction of natural resources which has led to a crisis in the accessibility of land and local construction materials. Besides, the houses themselves are poorly designed with no ventilation or outlet for smoke.

In this context, and keeping the priorities of women in view, the National Commission recommends:

1. An integrated development plan for the country should be made which must be ecosystem based and linked with other programmes like employment and income generation, education, and provision of credit, which fall under the purview of different Ministries.
2. Involvement, in the planning stage itself, of the people for whom the houses are being planned, besides involvement of civic authorities who would be in charge of not only building, but also development of the infrastructure.
3. Ongoing research on building technologies with the aim of reducing costs, simplifying designs, providing low-cost sanitation and such provisions as smokeless chulas to improve the environment so that planners can make informed choices. Housing plans should take into account the needs of women specially home-based workers whose workplace is the home.
4. Decentralised implementation of housing schemes with the participation of the local community. This will not only increase the involvement of the people but provide employment under various public and civic works of the Public Works Department, Central Public Works Department and other state authorities.
5. Funds to be made available at affordable interest rates and in the joint name of the couple and, in case of single women, without discrimination. Funds to the very poor should come in the form of building materials.
6. The needs of special groups like destitute women, those living in disaster-prone areas, and migrant workers, should be considered separately through providing destitute homes, and community shelters.
7. A complete review of existing laws and legislation to provide for joint ownership of property, stricter tenurial rights, and regulation of eviction and demolition which, in the case of the poor, should be accompanied by the provision of alternative homes.

The Commission recommends:

- (i) Simple, suitable toilet facilities should be provided in every village and urban slum. Common toilet facilities near the place of work and public places like markets should also be provided.
- (ii) Considering the availability of water, cement, and other resources, low-cost circular 2-pit water seal latrines should be provided for each family, in their

house, on a loan-cum-subsidy basis. It is established by experts that the cost of community or private latrines comes to the same. It is learnt that the cost of a pit water-seal latrine is about Rs.500/- (Sulabh Shauchalaya model or a suitable model), occupies an area of 7' x 4' x 5' (depth) and needs little water.

- (iii) The Government should provide for the assets, maintenance and training. The local Mahila Mandals should be entrusted with the entire programme. The Mahila Mandal should identify the homes, receive funds, masonry, and materials needed for the latrine like footrests, platform, drain, pits, organise maintenance, train the women technicians, motivate local women and men, and hold awareness camps periodically. The displaced scavenger women can be rehabilitated in production of the sanitary wares, soap, and maintenance.
- (iv) The human waste thus accumulated can be utilised for fuel through biogas plants, to be managed by Mahila Mandals.
- (v) All the housing schemes provided for the poor by the Government should have low-cost latrines.

### **Administrative machinery**

Although at the planning level, there is consciousness about women's low status and the need to focus on women's needs in development, at the implementation level this awareness percolates very slowly. The delivery system is based on a stereotyped concept of women's development where women are objects of pity or welfare and are given some benefits in a sporadic and haphazard manner. In their urgency to meet their targets, the developmental agencies are not concerned about whether there is an adequate coverage of women or not. In fixing targets, there is generally no consideration of women as a separate, disadvantageous group. The implementation machinery is largely insensitive to the basic needs of women in poverty. However, the experience of IRDP where there is a constant pressure from the centre to fulfil the target of 30% women beneficiaries, has been that the implementation, though slow, has been positive.

From its studies, the Commission has reached the conclusion that there should be an infrastructure in every state for helping women in economic ventures. Although a new infrastructure may be desirable, the Commission would not like to recommend a proposal which would lead to infructuous expenditures. The Commission, therefore, would like to recommend that the existing State Advisory Boards should be strengthened. They have a great potential for helping the rural poor women in the informal sector but at present are not very effective.

If women's programmes are to be undertaken, they need manpower support

and preparatory training as well as access to consultancy. There is limited delegation of powers, at time delays of 9 to 12 months take place for sanctioning of grants. The Board's procedure for sanctioning of loans needs to be reassessed and they should be revitalised to help women in poverty. In addition, adequate linkages with the state governments need to be built up. They should also promote establishment of more voluntary agencies. When the Board was constituted in 1953, in the initial years it assisted around 3000 voluntary agencies and in 1988 it assists approx. 10,000 voluntary agencies. Since the voluntary agencies are unevenly distributed and not always in the interior, it is necessary that the number of such agencies should be expanded, to reach out to a large number of rural poor women at a faster rate. However, a cautious approach should be adopted so that there is no mushroom growth of fake organizations which exist only on paper.

During its tours, the Commission was able to study the work of the Departments of Social Welfare and Women's Development Corporation in the States. The Commission is of the opinion that the Women's Development Corporations have a better potential to reach out to the poor women in a more effective way than the State Departments. However, these Development Corporations are only in five States, so far, and have their limitations in terms of resources and the context in which they work. Their approach in certain cases is restricted only to a few activities like grant of loan or subsidy. Some of the Corporations, with the assistance of NORAD (Norwegian Aid), a Central Scheme, have set up some production units. The Commission feels that such Corporations should be set up in every State and the terms of reference expanded so that they play an effective promotional role. Poor women aware of only the employer and employee relationship are not familiar with the concepts of entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and credit institutions. The Corporations should take care of these needs and also perform feasibility and marketing studies so that activities which have a market are promoted.

The National Commission has observed that, under various developmental schemes, there is variation in the component of loans and subsidies. Similarly, the quantum of stipend also differs, as also the training programmes, leading to imbalances: programmes which may not be very viable and useful tend to get more response because of the quantum of stipend being paid. Therefore, stipends need to be standardized.

At the field level different Departments tend to work in a compartmentalised manner. It is recommended that field functionaries should be imparted information regarding programmes of the related Departments. This is necessary as women in poverty are normally involved in more than one activity and the functionary whom they contact, should be able to impart information on other activities as well.

The Commission is of the opinion that women workers are in a better position to reach out to other women and have a greater understanding of women's problems. It is, therefore, recommended that in all Departments, there should be at least 30 per

cent women workers.

Women's representation should be in all decision-making levels, right from the lowest rung of the hierarchy to the highest. The decision-making bodies may be government or local bodies like panchayats or municipalities.

The National Commission has observed that, in spite of special programmes for SC/ST the women in these groups lag far behind than men in taking advantage of such programmes. The Scheduled Caste Corporations in the State Governments also have not been laying emphasis on the coverage of women. Even in the Tribal Plans and the SC Component plan, separate targets for women should be fixed.

The plight of poor women amongst the minorities is even more pitiable. Their problem is poverty and isolation. The levels of literacy and health are low. The Muslim women, in particular, are more confined within their homes, situated in high density areas. The artisans and home-based producers cannot venture out of their homes because of purdah and social inhibitions. The entire marketing of the products produced by them is done by the menfolk, the result being that the cash does not reach the women. The Commission strongly recommends that the needs and interests of poor women among the minorities should be reflected in the Plan allocations. With the spread of education, Muslim women are becoming keener to avail of the new opportunities. Therefore, special efforts should be made to bring them into the mainstream with other women.

Similarly, women in the North-Eastern States deserve special attention. They tend to remain outside the national mainstream. Communication facilities are very poor. Prevalence of high levels of alcoholism and use of drugs by the men has led to further deterioration in the economic status of the family besides causing mental tension to women; special steps should be taken to check this. Women of this region face the additional problem of harassment from the armed personnel patrolling certain areas. Further, the benefits of the Central Schemes, and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, do not percolate down to these far-flung areas. At times, even Government orders/circulars do not reach the sub-divisional levels. The Commission recommends that it is not enough to give plan allocations to these States, but also ensure their proper utilisation. There should be better communication between the centre and the States governments. Monitoring and evaluation of programmes under central and centrally sponsored schemes should be made more effective.

The Commission recommends that all poor women should be safeguarded by conscious and deliberate policy against exploitation by the middlemen and harassment from petty officials such as inspectors, constables, municipal authorities and other local bodies.

Fair price shops should be well stocked as poor women hardly get all the items due to them, as per the ration cards. A matter for greater concern and worry

is that poor women, specially seasonal and migratory labour, do not get even the ration cards. They have to purchase essential commodities at open market rates, which they can ill afford. The Commission recommends effective implementation and supervision of the distribution system of essential commodities. It also recommends that Janta sarees should be available at all fair price shops. Each woman should be entitled to two Janta sarees annually at controlled rates. This will be a great relief to the poor women who normally have to spend about Rs.50/- for one saree and blouse, which at controlled rates would be available for Rs.13 to 15. In all consumer cooperatives running fair price shops, the women should constitute 50 per cent of the membership.

The Commission recognises the negative impact of the attitude of the petty police officials in relation to poor women's working conditions. The Commission would, however, like to mention that poor women, specially adivasi and harijan women, need to be protected from the atrocities of the police. Although, at the higher levels, there are indications of a sympathetic attitude towards women, by and large the attitude of the police is unsympathetic. When the police join hands with the local antisocial elements, then there is no end to the harassment faced by the poor women. The Commission recommends that the police being an important arm of the administration should function as an instrument of development. Special measures should be taken up for sensitisation of police to women's issues and their problems. This may be done through periodical training programmes, giving awards and increasing the number of women personnel at the lower and middle levels.

The Commission recognises that the administrative machinery has an important role to play in alleviating the condition of the poor, specially women. It recommends that the administrative machinery needs to be entrusted with values of integrity, honesty and concern for the poor. This may be done through periodic refresher courses and also by developing mechanisms by which officers at all levels should be entrusted for a sufficient length of time, with the responsibility of planning and implementation of projects for the poor.

### **Political and social will**

From the study of the existing systems, the prevailing social attitudes and cultural ethos, the National Commission has come to the conclusion that the presence or absence of a political will is a very crucial factor in determining the success or failure of a programme. Where anti-women traditions are perpetuated, and the various mechanisms, specially the delivery mechanism, is consciously and unconsciously working against women, the presence of a strong political will becomes the single most important factor to bring about a change in the status of unprotected labouring women.

Ideally, the social will for changing women's status should precede the political will. However, in a situation where a vast majority of women are working in

the informal, unorganized and self-employed sectors, living a life of deprivation and exploitation, the creation of a strong social will by a minority of people does not seem to be likely. It will take a long time for women to develop the power to resist exploitation and organize themselves for this purpose.

The implications of a strong political will are that it will have a direct effect on the planning process and on the system of implementation. The government machinery through which development resources are channelised, has often proved to be indifferent and ineffective in reaching the poor labouring women. And for this, the responsibility has to be shared by the political as well as the administrative leadership.

Since women in poverty are victims of the existing social systems, attitudes, and prejudices, one of the factors which can bring about an improvement in their status is the creation of the social will. Social will has to be created in the community, a work which has been started by voluntary action but needs to be accelerated by efforts of the Government through the instruments of education, communication and research. The measures have already been suggested under the appropriate headings mentioned above. The responsibility of the society in this context cannot be underrated. If society and women themselves do not become aware and act as watchdogs of their rights, guaranteed in the Constitution and various legislations, they cannot legitimately expect the existing systems, which tend to favour the vested interest, to benefit them. Women's organizations have the responsibility of acting as pressure groups on the system and also becoming repositories through which development resources can be channelized.

The gap which exists between women with resources and women without resources should be bridged by women who have education, knowledge, and leadership, and are entrepreneurs and professionals. They should assist their impoverished sisters in articulating their demands, bringing them into greater visibility, and helping them to resist exploitation, so that they may rise above their present status of poverty and deprivation. It is only when women can get together as a homogenous group, irrespective of caste, class, community and activity differences, that their collective voice will be heard and yield results.

Signed:

Ela R. Bhatt  
Chairman

Dr. Armaity Desai  
Member

Dr. R. Thamarajakshi  
Member

Mrinal Pande  
Member

Jaya Arunachalam  
Member  
(not signed)

Veena Kohli  
Member Secretary



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